















STUDIES IN POLISH  
LIFE AND HISTORY

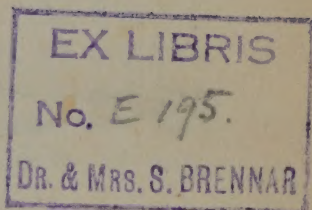


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# STUDIES IN POLISH LIFE AND HISTORY

BY

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## PREFACE

MY hope, in preparing this series of Studies, has been to produce a book which, while making no claim to exceptional learning or to original research, might nevertheless give a sufficient insight for all practical purposes into things Polish. My own experience has taught me that such a guide does not exist in English. A few excellent books have been published of late years, those of Miss Gardner, Professor Bruce Boswell, Lord Eversleigh, Mr. J. H. Harley, and Professor Alison Phillips, for instance—to all of whom I beg to acknowledge my indebtedness—but none of them covers the whole field. This I, greatly daring, have made some attempt to do! I can only hope that my book is as free from errors as may be, and that it may usefully occupy a place on the bookshelves of busy people, giving as it does a general view of the country, its inhabitants and history.

I have to thank the Rev. A. E. Warr, B.D., for his helpful revision of the proofs. To Miss Gardner I owe a very deep debt for permission to use her translations of passages from Polish works. Practically all the translations in the volume are hers except where specially ascribed to other authors. Nor must I omit to mention my obligation to Miss Chaplicka, whose lamented death prevented the revision by her of more than a few of these Studies, but whose kind interest in my work I can never forget.

A. E. TENNANT.

GLASGOW, 1924.



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# CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

## DYNASTY OF THE PIASTS (962-1386)

962-999	MIESZKO I	First Christian ruler. Held Germans and Russians in check. Established eastern frontier at River Bug.
999-1025	BOLESŁAW I	First king. Gniezno created independent Metropolitan See for Poland. Wars with Bohemia and Russia.
1025-1034	MIESZKO II	Idle and dissolute. Lost overlordship of Bohemia, Moravia and Saxony.
1041-1058	CASIMIR I	Pacified country and restored its prestige.
1058-1081	BOLESŁAW II	Carried on wars in Hungary in favour of Bela and in Russia in support of Isislav. Took Kiev. Excommunicated by Stanislaw, Bishop of Cracow, for his evil life. Murdered the Bishop and was punished by the imposition of an Interdict on Poland.
1081-1102	WLADISŁAW HERMAN	Interdict removed, but Poland reduced to the status of a Dukedom.
1102-1139	BOLESŁAW III	Wars with Bohemia, Pomerania, Hungary, Russia. Left Poland among his sons.
1139-1305	PARTITIONAL PERIOD	Country split up into small and feeble principalities, always at variance and unable to make headway against enemies.
1208		Coming of the Teutonic Order to Prussia.
1221		Knights of the Sword incorporated with it.
1230		Compact of Kruszwicz gave it the Baltic provinces of East and West Prussia.

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1234		These lands surrendered to the Pope and received again by the Knights as vassals of Rome and Princes of the Empire.
1241 and 1259		Chief attacks by Mongols, when different parts of Poland were ravaged, depopulated and almost burnt out.
1300-1306	WENCESLAW OF BOHEMIA	Husband of late King Przemislaw's daughter. Unpopular; deposed.
1309-1330	WLADISLAW I	Reunited Great and Little Poland and ended Partitional Period. Revived royal rank. Defeated Teutonic Knights at Plowce, 1332.
1333-1370	CASIMIR III	First Polish statesman. Introduced administrative, economic and legal reforms. Founded schools, churches and hospitals. Enfranchised the burghers. Added East Galicia with Lwow to Poland.
1370-1382	LOUIS OF HUNGARY	Ruled Poland as a Hungarian province by regents who oppressed the people. In 1382 Jadwiga, niece of Casimir III, was elected queen. In 1386 she married Jagailo of Lithuania and founded the Jagellon dynasty.

### THE LITHUANIAN GRAND DUCHY (1235-1569)

1235	Union of scattered clans under RINGOLD.
1240-1263	MINDOYG conquered Grodno and threw off yoke of Sword Bearers. Nominally Christian.
1315-1342	GEDYMIN conquered Brest, Chernigow, Kiev, Little Russia, Volhynia. Statesman and reformer. Pagan.
1347-1377	OLGERD conquered Novgorod, Podolia, Dnieper basin, and raided Crimea. Orthodox.
1377-1434	JAGAILO married Jadwiga, Queen of Poland, and united two countries. He and his people received into Catholic Church. In 1410 handed over Grand Duchy to Witowt, who defeated Teutonic Knights at Tannenberg. Union of Horodlo (1413) put Poland and Lithuania on equal political footing.



- 1569 Union of Lublin completely incorporated Poland and Lithuania : one king, one Diet, one currency ; all lands held in common ; but high officials appointed separately for the two countries.

## JAGELLON DYNASTY (1386-1572)

- 1386-1434 **WLADISLAW II** (IAGAILO) Dynastic union of Poland and Lithuania, 1386. Union of political equality at Horodlo, 1413. Teutonic Order, defeated by combined forces at Tannenberg, 1410, surrendered Dantzig, etc., to Poland. Wars of defence against Tartars under Tamerlane. Wladislaw a successful statesman rather than a soldier.
- 1434-1447 **WLADISLAW III** King of Hungary also, an absentee from Poland. Killed leading Hungarian armies against Turks at Battle of Varna.
- 1447-1492 **CASIMIR IV** Great statesman. Prussian League offered land and fortresses of Teutonic Order to Casimir, 1454. Twelve years' war. Peace of Thorn, 1466, confirmed cession of territory to Poland, but Order retained East Prussia on a military tenure. Election of Polish Crown Prince as King of Bohemia led to war with Matthias of Hungary and bad relations with Muscovy. Confirmation of Moldavia's vassalage to Poland. Turks attempted to capture Danubian Principalities and injured Polish trade. War with Turkey, 1485. Galicia ravaged, 1487 and 1490, by Tartars, Cossacks and Magyars.
- 1492-1501 **JOHN ALBERT** Anti-monarchical and anti-democratic revolution begun, which tended to give all power to the gentry.
- 1501-1506 **ALEXANDER** Weak government ; further revolutionary changes. Tartar and Muscovite raids.

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- 1506-1548 SIGISMUND I Restored ruined finances and quelled political disorder. Wars caused by aggression of Muscovy. Numerous and terrible Tartar raids. Fierce battles with them at Wisniewicz, 1510, Sokal, 1519, and Kaniow, 1527. Mazovia incorporated with Poland, 1526. Spread of Protestant sects led to severe penal statutes and occasional burning of heretics, but no systematic persecution.
- 1548-1572 SIGISMUND II Great statesman. Enforced religious truce. After 1560 reaction against Protestantism. Introduction of Jesuits, 1565. Courland and Semgallen became fiefs of Polish crown, 1559. Livonia incorporated with Lithuania, 1561. Union of Lublin, 1569, finally incorporated Poland and Lithuania.

### ELECTIVE MONARCHY

- 1573-1574 HENRY OF  
VALOIS First Pacta Conventa. After thirteen months as King of Poland, Henry fled back to France, of which he had become king.
- 1576-1586 STEPHEN  
BATHORY Married Princess Anna of Poland and accepted Pacta Conventa. Siege of Dantzic, 1577. War with Muscovy; Livonia regained and Polotsk annexed to Lithuania. University of Wilno founded.
- 1587-1632 SIGISMUND III Civil war. War with Sweden, which took part of Livonia. Pretender to Muscovite throne supported, 1604. Invasion of Muscovy, 1609. Capture of Smolensk, 1611. Crown Prince Wladislaw Tsar, 1610-13. Poles expelled from Moscow, 1612. By Truce of Deulino, 1618, Poles renounced their pretensions to throne of Muscovy, but by the retention of much territory extended their frontier to its furthest limits. Turks defeated Poles at Cecora, 1621, and

- threatened subjugation of the country, but were routed at Chocim, 1622. During Turkish war Sweden took the rest of Livonia.
- 1632-1648 WLADISLAW IV Successful campaign against Muscovy, 1633. Rebellion of Chmielnicki begun.
- 1648-1669 JOHN CASIMIR Cossack leader, joined by Tartars and insurgent peasants, took Lemberg. After breakdown of negotiations and rebel defeat, Chmielnicki transferred Cossack allegiance to Tsar. Liberrum Veto first used, 1652. Swedish invasion of Poland, 1656, ended by Peace of Oliva, 1660. Muscovite invasion of Poland, 1654, and subsequent war ended by Truce of Andrusovo, 1667. Cession of East Prussia to Elector of Brandenburg, 1656. Attempts in 1658-1660 to reform constitution failed through intervention of Austria.
- 1669-1673 MICHAEL  
WISNIOWIECKI Invasion by Turks and cession of Polish territory to them with an annual tribute. Shameful treaty denounced. Turks routed by Sobieski, who took the strong fortress of Chocim and regained Danubian Principalities, 1673.
- 1674-1696 JOHN III  
SOBIESKI Turkish invasion, 1675. War with Pasha of Damascus. Turks defeated at Vienna, 1683, and driven out of Austria. John III unable to cope with turbulent nobles. Country latterly undefended and subjected to regular Tartar raids—in 1695 up to gates of Lemberg.
- 1697-1733 AUGUSTUS II Peace of Carlowicz with Turks and loss of Polish territory, 1699. Poland subjugated by Charles XII of Sweden, 1701-1707. Augustus deposed and Stanislaw Leszczyński made king, 1704-1709. Restoration of Augustus, 1709. Peace with Sweden, 1720. At death of Augustus Stanislaw Leszczyński re-elected, but unable to maintain himself. Civil war and siege of Dantzic.

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- 1735-1763 AUGUSTUS III Absentee king who did not govern or defend realm. Poland utterly stagnant, her decadence complete.
- 1764-1795 STANISLAW  
PONIATOWSKI Attempted reforms prevented by Russia and Prussia who used as pretext for interference the protection of Dissident minorities. Partition resolved on. Treaty signed, 1772; division carried out, 1776. Period of reform in Poland, culminating in the new constitution of May 3, 1791. Confederation of Targowicz invited Russian intervention. Second Partition, 1793. Third Partition, 1795.

### POST-PARTITION EVENTS

- 1806 Napoleon raised false hopes of Polish restoration. Formation of Polish Legion.
- 1807 Constitution of Duchy of Warsaw.
- 1814-1815 Congress of Vienna gave Duchy of Warsaw with additions to Tsar as Kingdom of Poland. Grant of liberal constitution.
- 1830-1832 Rising against Russian oppression and courageous struggle for independence. Early Polish victories; then defeats. Barbarities of conquerors and suppression of Polish nationality.
- 1846 Insurrection and agrarian troubles in Galicia. Polish Republic of Cracow annexed to Austria.
- 1863-1864 Secret conscription of Poles led to last insurrection against Russia. On its suppression all privileges taken from Poles and russianisation of country begun.
- 1868 By Imperial Ukase Poland absolutely incorporated with Russia.

THROW off sadness, throw off terror.  
Well I know what toil remaineth  
On the road ; what pain, what sorrow.  
Trust thee to the poet's vision.  
The dawn of victory now shines.

In our native land immortal,  
On that soil, so dearly loved,  
On our soil, that soil of ours,  
Shall arise a race renewed,  
Never yet by man beheld.

The Polish land, the Polish Eden,  
The desert of an age-long sadness,  
Is desolate no more nor mourning.  
Nor behind me nor before me  
Is there darkness any more.  
All is light and all is justice.  
Clear is now our hallowed past,  
Clear our purgatorial anguish.

KRASINSKI, *Dawn*.





# STUDIES IN POLISH LIFE AND HISTORY

## I

### INTRODUCTORY

THE name of Poland, it is to be feared, presents only fragmentary pictures and misleading mirages to many people in this country : we fail to see her clearly ; we cannot grasp her as a whole ; we do not place her easily either in the political or in the social and cultural worlds. Nor is this vagueness and bewilderment surprising. [The difficulty of comprehending the real Poland, whether as a state or as a people, is almost insuperably great owing to the conditions that prevailed in the country for the four generations during which Poland was deprived of nationhood and, consequently, of development on lines suited to the genius of her citizens. During the nineteenth century, when human progress was most rapid on at least the material and scientific sides, while other nations were free to progress to the limit of their capacity and in accordance with the genius of their people, Poland lay in a back-water, tongue-tied under an extraordinarily minute censorship, spell-bound in the grip of alien governments. Being denied discussion of every living issue, and lacking opportunity to put political theories to the touchstone of proof, the Poles were inevitably thrown into an unreal realm of imagination and day-dream. Thus they developed views of their place and mission in the world not quite in harmony with the facts of every-

day life—views which appear to us extravagant and even chimerical. Such fantasies, born of the night of suffering and “purgatorial anguish,” will pass—nay have already passed—from Polish minds: but the form of the “Polish Eden” yet to be lies on the knees of the gods.

Polish patriotism, it must be admitted, has always been in the grand style—a veritable *mania grandiosa*—and since the Great War it appears to many sober Britons to have been little short of megalomania. The well-known historian Ashkenazy, when in London in 1920, told an interviewer that he had come “to combat the existing disfavour manifested in this country against Polish expansionism.” He went on: “I should prefer not to have a resuscitated Poland at all than to have one which is not big. . . . We entertain the best wishes for the small nations, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, etc., but our position is vastly different. Poland is a big nation.”

Perhaps we have not been accustomed to regard her quite in that light. It is difficult for us to realise that Poland was at one time, not so very distant in the life of nations, a first-class state. We are apt to forget that she was Europe’s eastern bulwark in days when, without her, western civilisation might have collapsed before the military strength of the Turk; when, but for her services rendered freely and without price, Ottoman misrule and barbarism might not have been confined to the south-east corner of the continent. Wars that were “alternations of victories and repaired disasters,” but in which in either case Polish lives were offered up in the common cause, undoubtedly sapped for the benefit of mankind the strength of what for those days was a “big nation.” And Poland cannot forget her former high estate, nor erase from her memory some of the most glorious pages in her history.

Still, average Britons think, that is ancient history: what of the present Poland? Has she learned any useful lessons from her truly terrible adversities—adversities which we cannot but remember were in part the price

paid for extreme inefficiency and lack of political common sense? How can we "know where we are" with a people so unpractical and seemingly so devoid of political aptitude and stability? To such questioners one would reply: Poland is complex undoubtedly; she is idealistic rather than practical; she *has* a temperament: in a word she is a Slav, and between Briton and Slav "there yawns a psychological abyss." You must not expect easily or altogether to understand her. But you must study her mind and history if you desire to arrive at a moderate degree of comprehension of a fascinating people, and at some measure of sympathy with them in the very uphill task they are even now tackling gallantly and with considerable success. The regeneration of a nation cannot be achieved in a day, nor can one expect inexperienced leaders, intoxicated still with the flamboyant dreams of the idealist, to become at once prudent and practised statesmen.

We have often in the past railed against the absolutism of continental governments, and have been moved by the unhappiness of nations ruled by unchecked and all-powerful bureaucracies. Have we comprehended that the political theory and practice of Poland were on lines utterly divergent from those of the autocracies which surrounded her? The contrast is as great in the case of Slavonic Russia as in that of Teutonic Prussia. Only compare Polish individualism, limited to a class though it was, with the Muscovite regime. In it the Tsar was all, the nobles his instruments, the people nothing—"no one troubles himself about them: they exist only on paper."<sup>1</sup> Or compare it with the bureaucratic efficiency and systematic order of the Prussian state, where a well-drilled and meekly acquiescent people had no other idea than that of obedience to an all-powerful and all-wise governing machine, whose material success testified, as they thought, to its superiority and justified their submission.

The Polish government was as unlike each of these as

<sup>1</sup> Pogodin, time of Nicholas I.

possible: it was in fact unique, and its faults are only too plainly visible. It was individualistic to a degree, disruptive and disorderly. Its republican equality was founded, unhappily, on the degradation and exploitation of the masses of the people, and it lacked the elements which make for stability and permanence. Yet from the democratic standpoint the Polish state was far in advance of the rest of Europe. Its independence, its devotion to representative government, its determined opposition to monarchical privilege, though carried to fanatical extremes—to a pitch of confusion which rendered easy its complete extinction by its enemies—should appeal to Britons. They were in line with our efforts, more successful because more balanced and practical, to gain and to keep democratic institutions. But the Polish temperament forbade the middle way, so congenial to the Anglo-Saxon, and deterioration, once set in, proceeded with appalling rapidity, fostered as it was by the selfish attentions of neighbouring states. Yet, in spite of all her admitted faults and failings, "one loves Poland as one loves freedom,"<sup>1</sup> and her essential virtues—attachment to liberty, chivalrous courage and refinement of spirit—are a mantle which covers a multitude of sins.

Apathy as regards the cause of Poland has existed for some time in this country, but a certain impatience with her pretensions, and even a feeling of hostility, are plants of quite recent growth. For nearly a century after the first Partition British opinion was strongly sympathetic towards her. Our statesmen made protest against the various evasions or infractions of the Treaty of Vienna perpetrated by her conquerors; our people joined the Friends of Poland Society, and in many ways demonstrated their interest in her fate and their wish to be helpful. But when it appeared in 1864 that the hope of Polish liberation was an impossible dream, public opinion in this country not unnaturally lost interest in the Polish Question. It was in every sense very far away from us. An unhappy business truly! But we could not single-handed

<sup>1</sup> Brandes, the Danish critic.



remedy it: the British fleet could not reach Poland! The account being therefore closed in our minds, we soon became somewhat bored by the tale of wrongs witnessed to by the Poles of the Dispersion—so indifferent that hardly anyone thought it worth while to add to the literature on the subject. There was no market in Britain for even a few of the many books which have evidenced the perennial interest felt by continental nations in this Question. With our customary insularity, now rudely broken, we did not see that it was important to us. The events of the War, however, and still more those of the Peace, have awakened at least some of the sleepers.

Even the heedless man in the street perceives to-day that the chain of autonomous states, stretching for over one thousand miles along the Russian border from Finland to Rumania, of which Poland is the chief, constitutes the bulwark of Europe and Asia, of the world indeed, against two of the greatest dangers which threaten them. For the red revolutionary virus of Bolshevism and the insidious penetrative policy of Germany are not, we know, mere bogies to frighten children. It is freely acknowledged that Poland is, as of yore, the bulwark of liberty, that she forms the keystone of the arch of European stability. It is ours to see to it that the supports of the arch are firm and unwavering, that her unpractised statesmen have the moral backing, the sympathetic understanding, and the tactful friendly help that British diplomacy can so well give them in the difficult fields of international politics. A strong democratic Poland, her independence unquestioned, her government and economic position stabilised, her reasonable aspirations satisfied, her population contented, would be an asset of the greatest value to this troubled post-war world.

And that not in the material sphere only: for the Slav mind is of different quality from that of Western peoples, valuing as it does above all the things of the intellect and of the spirit. In Russia the Slav mind has not in

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modern times had full expression : in Poland it has been held on a leash and under the direst restraint. Soon, as we hope, to be in both cases fetterless and fearless, what may we not expect from its youth and ardour ? We confidently look for the winning of many new steps on the slow path of progress, for many discoveries in the realms both of mind and of matter !



## II

### THE POLISH LAND

POLSKA, the land of the plain, consists of four long terraces or undulations extending from west to east in roughly parallel lines, and lies between the low sandy shores of the Baltic and the giant rampart of the Carpathians. It is drained by an extensive river-system whose main streams flow north-west or south-east. Its chief northern-flowing streams are the Oder in its upper reaches; the whole course of the Vistula with its tributaries; the Niemen; even the West Dwina. The Pruth, Dniester, Bug and Dnieper, which flow into the Black Sea, also have the greater part of their courses in territory which is Polish ethnographically.

Polish rivers are not navigable the whole year round. The Vistula is frozen over at Warsaw for at least eighty days, the Niemen at Tilsit for a hundred days or upwards. But they are wonderfully linked up with the river and canal systems both of Germany and Russia, so that transit by water is possible from the interior of Poland to the mouth of the Oder or of the Dnieper.

Snow does not lie thickly in Poland, as the rainfall is small and seasonal, being greatest in spring and autumn. The rainfall averages only from 21 to 30 inches, and is, naturally, heaviest in the Carpathian provinces. The temperature may rise to as much as 95 degrees in summer, and it falls as low as 37 degrees below zero in winter. But cold in Poland has not the deadly elemental intensity that makes the Russian winters so terrific, a cold which in the memorable year 1812 had more effect in discomfiting the Grande Armée of Napoleon than the Tsar's troops, devoted though they were.

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Polish roads are very bad, as is almost inevitable in a country where they have usually to be laboriously constructed without stones, alternately deep in mud and in dust, often quite impassable. Such difficulties by no means daunt the Poles, who drive long distances under conditions which make neither for comfort nor safety in order to pay the visits in which they take such pleasure.

In its greatest extension west and east the territory which at one time or other has been under Polish sovereignty, though all of it is not claimed now by Poland, stretches practically from the longitude of Berlin to that of Moscow, and from the latitude of Buda-Pesth to that of Moscow again. In the eighth century all the land east of the Elbe and west of the Bug was Slavonic, and most of it was Polish. The boundaries of Poland, however, have to be defined now—or at any time—largely by reference to its history, for it has only one natural frontier, the Carpathian Mountains. To travel in the ill-defined Polish plains gives one to realise how fortunate in barbarous times was our own land, with its inviolate shores. We have dwelt secure from invasion, and from the even more terrible menace of fierce predatory nomadic neighbours like those of Poland, who time and again appeared out of the steppe, worked their evil will, and disappeared again, no man knew whither. Savage raids of that kind, whose chief object was the carrying off of unfortunates whose price in Eastern markets would enrich their captors, never ceased for long ages to desolate Eastern Europe.

Physically, Poland may be divided from north to south into several regions differing from one another not only in elevation but in other characteristics.

1. Along the Baltic shores we have broad level stretches bordered inland by a wide table-topped ridge of from 400 to 700 feet above sea-level. These marshy flats, a tangled maze of sandy dunes, peat-bogs, muddy or sandy lakes, sluggish streams and thick bush, with occasional rich alluvial tracts, are quite clearly a remnant of the

conditions caused by the passing of the Glacial Age. Nature here, as in other parts of Northern Europe, is still at the Lacustrine stage of development. Only a slight further rise of elevation would serve in large part to drain this district and make it profitable to man. One day this region of the Mazurian Lakes—ancestral home of the terrible savages from whom the Prussians are named and partly descended, the so-called “patrimony” of the Kaiser—will be drained, and the Pripet marshes too, and millions of acres of ground fit for tillage will be gained for the use of Europe’s close-packed populations. It is no more impossible than was the reclamation of the Dutch polders from the sea, an achievement which was contrary to Nature’s operations while this will be in accordance with them.

Beginning on the west,<sup>1</sup> this Baltic shore region consists of Pomerania, which in remote times was Polish but was gained by Germans in the early Middle Ages, and West Prussia, which remained Polish until the first Partition. Here, at the mouth of the Vistula, stands Dantzic (Gdansk), Poland’s ancient port, best preserved of picturesque mediæval cities. It has had many changes of masters, but as the natural outlet for Polish commerce flourished best when it was from 1455<sup>2</sup> to 1793 a free and self-governing city under Poland’s suzerainty.

East of the Vistula lie East Prussia and the valley of the lower Niemen, the region of the Mazurian Lakes already mentioned, a district known to most of us as the scene of von Hindenburg’s great victories over the Russians in 1914. The aboriginal home of the Finnish tribe of the Borussians,<sup>3</sup> this province was colonised by Poles and by Lithuanians, and later was conquered by the crusading missionary Order of the Teutonic Knights, who spread their terror-striking armies northwards also into Courland and Livonia. All these provinces were long

<sup>1</sup> See map at end of book.

<sup>2</sup> See statistics given on page 178.

<sup>3</sup> Borussians, B’russians, Prussians. The inscription on a portrait of Frederick William II, by Schroeder, which belongs to the end of the eighteenth century, is “Borussorum Rex.”

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dominated by them, and their descendants form the aristocracy there to this day.

2. South of these Baltic flats lies the main Polish plain, from 300 to 450 feet above sea-level, beginning on the west with Great Poland and its ancient capital Posen (Poznan), where the earliest Polish kings are buried. Posen is a pleasant and well-built city. It belonged to the Hanseatic League, and was always a great trading centre. Its rôle of late years has been to "protect the relics of Polish individuality against an encroaching flood of Germanism" in a district which from time immemorial was the racial home of the Poles. Though under alien government, they always maintained their hold on the land, and remained, as ever, a stout outpost of Polonism against Teutonism.

The continuation of the plain in Mazovia, the basin of the middle Vistula, is moderately fertile, given up to the cultivation of the sugar-beet and to the industries of Warsaw, Lodz, Zyrardow, Tomasow and other towns, mostly modern in origin. Warsaw (Warszawa) itself became the Polish capital only in 1609. It is a handsome city, with many notable public buildings, a centre of art and of a particularly brilliant type of social life. This whole region, with Warsaw's great bridge as its nodal point, is destined to be a chief commercial centre of Europe—to be the link between East and West—for its railway systems join Europe's political and commercial capitals, and afford transit to the vast Asiatic hinterland of the West, to the White Sea and the Pacific.

East of Mazovia the plain is continued through Podlasia, marshy and wooded, and Polesie, in Tertiary times a great inland sea, now bog-land, largely forest-clad, and drained by the Pripet, a tributary of the Dnieper. Hidden in the fastnesses of these ancient woodlands (which cover some 21 per cent. of modern Poland) among the marshy thickets of its remote plains, in the only sanctuary now left them, and rapidly disappearing even there, wild animals are still to be found which are scarce or quite exterminated



in other places. The wild horse, which once roamed there, is extinct; the sable and reindeer have followed the ice-fields northwards; but the bear, wolf, lynx, elk, wild boar and wild goat afford a sport of which the Polish gentry are fond. Of unique interest among the creatures of this virgin forest of Bialowiesza is the aurochs, the European bison, long unknown elsewhere, a massive beast six feet high at the shoulder, maned, bearded, untamable. Only by the strict orders of the Tsars has the aurochs been preserved from extinction. It is not easily observed, as it lies in marshy thickets by day, and, like a carnivore, comes out to feed by night.

The people of this district are also uniquely interesting, for here among the marshes of Pinsk—so the most modern anthropologists and scientific investigators of origins tell us—was probably the cradle of the Slav race. Here to this day you have a distinctive type, fair, pale, not very tall; kind, gentle, dreamy; pure in blood; the direct descendants of the first Slavs, in all probability but little altered by all the generations and all the events that have passed since Slavonic history began. In such country as this there can be neither agriculture nor industry. The people are fishermen, hunters and woodcutters, living in primeval simplicity, with a primitive and old-world detachment from modern life and bustle, of whose doings indeed they rarely hear until years, perhaps decades, after the event. Neither the schoolmaster, the postman nor the rate-collector is abroad in this far-away spot. Each village, islanded amongst bottomless morasses, is as withdrawn from its neighbours by the nature of the ground as if it were in a different continent. "Here," in the words of a Red Cross nurse lately returned from duty in Poland (and her words apply more or less to agricultural Poland in general), "is a primitive Eastern world where Western standards are lost, and Western virtues—punctuality, efficiency, organisation—do not exist. The virtues of this people are different—imagination, simplicity, dignity, love of beauty. This world has a timelessness, a silence, a child-

likeness, and a faith which have long passed from the West."

3. South of the great plain lies a region of plateaux of an elevation of from 800 to 1,000 feet, afforested with oaks, beeches and limes, and intersected by watercourses and river valleys in which the villages nestle. It extends from the Oder to the lower Dniester, and contains the rich industrial district of Silesia with its coal-fields and iron-mines, and near by, the world-famous salt-mines of Wieliczka. Here in Little Poland, the true cultural home of the race, the venerable and storied city of Cracow (Kraków) stands in the delightful valley of the upper Vistula. Founded in prehistoric times, the capital from 1320 to 1609, in mediæval times one of the great cities of Europe both in commerce and in culture, Cracow recalls to Poles all that is most sacred and most glorious in their history. Its University, the "Akademia Jagiellonska," dates from 1364, and is therefore one of the oldest in the world. Its Gothic Cathedral, where the national heroes rest and where the kings were crowned, is a miracle of lavish and splendid decoration. The city has a grace and charm that is all its own: it has always been the heart of Poland and the shrine of its perfervid nationalism.

On the right bank of the Vistula is the plateau of Lublin, which was in very early times colonised by the Poles. It is a region of flourishing orchards and wheat-fields, at the extremity of which, at Zhitimir, begin the Black Lands of Russia proper, the most naturally fertile country in Europe.

Following the curve of the Carpathians south-eastwards lie Eastern Galicia and Podolia, where the waters of the Bug have their rise. Here, between the river-basins of the Dniester and the Dnieper, is the western part of the Ukraine or Borderland, the home of the Little Russian or Ruthenian people. Lemberg (Lwów), the cosmopolitan capital of Eastern Galicia, reflects the character of the two provinces. Founded in the thirteenth century as a strong place-of-arms to check the looting Tartar hordes

and constantly burdened with the necessity of defence, Lemberg nevertheless became an important emporium of trade between the Baltic and the Adriatic. Its devastation and ruin by Charles XII of Sweden 200 years ago was so thorough that it has only recovered within the last half-century. Indeed, these provinces have been the cockpit of Eastern Europe, battled over by Poles, Turks, Tartars, Lithuanians, Russians, Cossacks, Hungarians and Wallachians, raided and ravaged by each in turn. "Kiev, holy Kiev, Mother of Russian Cities"—which for nearly four centuries, however, belonged to Lithuania or Poland—is situated near the borders of the Ukraine, which stretches across Russia almost to the Caspian Sea. Kiev is typically Russian in appearance, with its Eastern-looking streets and markets, and it dates from days before the dawn of Russian history. Its Cathedral of St. Sophia, whose golden-domed campanile is visible far over the steppe, is of hoary antiquity; it contains the sarcophagus of Yaroslav its builder, who ruled a great Russian principality here in the time of Edward the Confessor when the Poles were only learning Christianity from Queen Dombrowka, the Bertha of Poland.

4. The southern border of Poland consists of the Alpine region of the Carpathians, including the Tátra Mountains and their foothills, where the scenery is very grand and where are Poland's favourite summer resorts. This not very fertile country is mainly pastoral, but it has also much mineral wealth in its salt-mines and oil-wells.

The Polish plain then, we see, is essentially a land of ancient forests, of sluggish rivers and marshy hollows frozen over for three months or more in winter, of country houses and scattered agricultural villages. These villages squat here and there in sheltered hollows, their huts smothered under wide-spreading thatched roofs. Their traffic is conducted by means of primitive springless wooden carts made by the peasants. Everywhere birch-trees, slim, satin-clad, droop dejectedly in ankle-deep snow, in the



brown muddy pools of a thaw, or in the deep dust of summer. The land is all one great *pole* or field unmarked by hedges or dividing lines, where a windmill, a russet-brown rye stack, a group of girls gleaning in the level rays of the sinking sun, are notable objects, and the mansion of a noble, with its many offshoots and fine avenue of approach, is a prominent feature of the landscape.

Though the countryside is charming in the tender green of spring and brilliant in summer with a profusion of wild flowers, on the whole Polish landscapes cannot be described as cheerful. The colouring of the wide plains is dull and neutral. Even the magnificent forests, which stretch monotonously to far horizons, vary but little in shade, consisting as they do of but one or two kinds of trees. There is no relief in such scenes, no special character. But there is a mysterious unaccountable sense of power in the rolling spaces of the Ukraine that impresses the beholder with an uncanny elemental fear of Nature. Dun heaving wastes like those of a sunless ocean breathe melancholy and a feeling of oppression into the soul. This is not a land to make the heart rejoice and sing for mere pleasure in its beauty—or so it seems to us—and viewing its melancholy monotony one understands why the deepest chord in the Slav mentality is sadness. It is a sadness, too, unmitigated by much good fortune or prosperity. For the history of the Slav, whether he be a Russian or a Pole, is a tragedy: in the former case an almost unrelieved tragedy; in the latter, a tragedy relieved by moments of hectic splendour, by episodes of quixotic gallantry and chivalry unmatched in the history of the world. Yet his native land—the plain, the forest, the steppe—appeals tremendously to the Pole. “How much I owe you, my native trees! . . . forests of Lithuania, so full of beauty and of majesty!” exclaims Mickiewicz. He loves it not less than the Highlander does his rugged hills and lonely glens: its very soil is sacred to him.

### III

## THE POLAND OF EARLY TIMES

THOUGH the Slavs may, as already noted, have had as their original home the country of the Pinsk marshes and westwards to the Vistula, the first historical mention we have of the race shows them settled on the Danube, whence they were dislodged by the Romans in Trajan's time. Some of them, known later as Chechs and Serbs, went north-west and south-east respectively; the progenitors of the Russian nation moved towards the Dnieper basin; others spread all over the German plain, as far as the Rhine and the Baltic. The migrant Slavs who settled on the upper Oder and Vistula and about the sources of the rivers Dnieper, Bug and Pripet were in early times known as Lechs: after the twelfth century as Poles.<sup>1</sup>

They were not then in contact with the Germans. Interposed between Pole and Teuton lay territories of other Slavonic tribes—Silesia, Saxony, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Linonia and other districts with names less familiar—which later were entirely absorbed into Teutonic stock. The chief traces of their early settlements are to be found in place-names (a sure and enduring guide), and in a few scattered communities of "Wends" and "Sorbs," Slavs who are still recognisable as such to this day in their old locations.

The irruption into the Danubian plain in the tenth century of the Magyars, and the consolidation there of the kingdom of Hungary, drove a wedge between the

<sup>1</sup> The word Poland means Poles, dwellers in the plain or field, and is better rendered without the terminal letter "d," as in the German Polen. The name Lech, Lechy, which is supposed to be an old Bohemian word meaning free or noble, is still used in some remote districts. Slav means glory.

Poles and their brethren the Southern Slavs which has endured ever since. Communication between them and the Russian Slavs was almost equally impeded by the vast, nearly impenetrable marsh-lands of the upper Niemen and the Pripet, and on account of the fierce and barbarous nature of the warlike races, such as the Lithuanians and the Yaldzvingi,<sup>1</sup> which inhabited those lands. In different but effectual ways, then, the Polish Slavs were isolated from other peoples of their own blood, so that they developed on lines of their own, with a characteristic polity and culture.

All Slavs were in ancient times noted for their gentleness and their unwarlike dispositions, so much so that they, time and again, fled before more aggressive peoples and gave up their settlements to them. The Polish Slavs shared this characteristic of their race.<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that they elected their rulers, often regardless of primogeniture or family, not for their outstanding martial qualities, but for others, less attractive, one would think, in the eyes of primitive folk. Piast, the wheelwright chosen king about 842, was pious, mild and pacific. His reign, when there was neither foreign war nor domestic broil, was Poland's halcyon time, fondly remembered even now by the Polish peasantry. Of his son Ziemowit the chronicler admiringly relates: 'He thirsted not after conquest; he loved his subjects too well to waste their blood in satisfaction of a selfish ambition.' Yet under stress of necessity he taught his subjects the art of war and obliged a circle of enemies—Hungarians, Moravians and Russians—to sue for peace. Poles were not by nature combative, though often compelled to fight. "They had no hatred of foreigners," it has been remarked; "not even for those who were most hostile and aggressive; they had no desire to impose their own language, manners or religion on others; they had no proselytising zeal, no

<sup>1</sup> The Yaldzvingi became extinct or were absorbed by the thirteenth century. A few place-names remain where they were once a powerful tribe. One of these, meaning Yaldzving Graves, may mark the spot where they fought their last fight.

<sup>2</sup> This matter is more fully discussed on pages 67, 101, 102, 195.

tendency to exclusiveness." Thus foreign conquest, as an end in itself, or as a means to an end, had no attractions for them.

In process of time the Poles inevitably threw up occasional soldier kings, such as Boleslaw II and Boleslaw III; they developed a certain aptitude for war and made dashing cavalrymen; no one ever impugned their personal courage. Though constantly involved in border disputes, it should be observed that they rarely exploited their victories to the full or exacted territorial spoils from the enemy. As late as the middle of the seventeenth century Queen Maria Ludovika, wife of Wladislaw IV, referring to the fact that they failed to press home their victories, declared that the Poles had not the least idea how wars should be carried on! They went, if sufficiently threatened or annoyed; they saw; they conquered—if they *did* conquer, it was not always so!—and then they returned, satisfied.

How, we may inquire, was the easy, peaceable Slav nature hardened and tempered, even to this degree, in the Poles?

A reason that may be advanced with some confidence is admixture with foreign stock. The Poles claim to be the purest of the Slavs, but it is certain that they did not find North-Central Europe an empty wilderness when they entered upon it from the south-east. Everywhere there were aborigines who were exterminated, or more often absorbed, by new-comers. Thus the Russian Slavs absorbed the Finns, and the Germans absorbed the Prussians, Western Slavs, and other races that preceded them. The Poles must have had the same experience, though the facts are obscure.

We may be sure, too, that the Scandinavian sea-rovers did not neglect only the Polish rivers. Rather the Oder, the Vistula and the Niemen were near and convenient for them. We know that they penetrated into the Dnieper basin, a much more laborious matter, that they gave the tribes of Slavonic Russia coherence and discipline and acted as the spear-head to their armies so that they



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became the terror of the Greeks and all the dwellers on the Euxine shores. They gave a dynasty to Russia which was the means of unifying the race. Wherever the Northmen appeared they left their impress, and that a strong one. There are indications that Scandinavians served as mercenaries in early Polish armies, and no doubt bold and hardy adventurers of Viking blood married into Polish families. Though they never dominated that country as they did others, they must have had a share in modifying the temperament of its people.

Probably the chief factor in the fashioning of this aspect of the Polish character, however, was environment. Simple necessity made soldiers of the Poles, as it has done at times of all peoples. They were ringed in by expanding and ambitious nations all hungering for slices of Polish land, and were obliged to defend themselves or perish. Often it looked as if they preferred to perish! The essentially unmilitary temperament of the Poles constantly cropped out in the course of their troubled history, and usually with consequences disastrous to themselves.

We have now traced the settlement of the Poles in a land of their own, have noticed how they were divided from other branches of the Slavonic race, and indicated some of the influences that moulded them. Their authentic history does not begin until towards the end of the tenth century, with Mieszko I, the fifth prince of the Piast dynasty. There are many interesting tales, more or less legendary, of his predecessors during the three hundred years from the establishment by Lech I of his capital at Gneszno. These tales show that the Poles had even then marked individuality and a democratic ideal of government rare in the world at any time, and unique in those early ages. The person of a prince, or the preservation of a dynasty, was of small account to them. Over and over again the people took matters into their own hands and changed political methods or governors that did not suit them. They were neither afraid to experiment, nor, if the experiment failed, to

drop it. In those shadowy days, as in days to come, we find that Poland, inspired by a love of freedom and an adoration of personal liberty that were unique in their intensity, tested various types of government and made trial of any and every expedient by which she could hope to translate her ideals into practice. But in the end, after many centuries of checquered experiences, ground between the upper and nether millstones of the ruthless and predatory Muscovite and Teutonic Empires, the maintenance of the Polish paradox—rebellion a normal means of promoting good government—became too impossible. The nation that sought to live by that paradox received its *logical* reward, and ceased as a political entity to exist.

## IV

### THE MAKING OF POLAND UNDER THE PIASTS

POLAND's long and vivid though chequered history begins at the time when through the portals of the Church she entered the Latin world. Her adoption of Christianity was a decisive step: it brought her within the comity of nations and made her a member of the European Concert of that day. In the estimation of contemporary and later writers and chroniclers Mieszko I figures as a missionary king. But it is plain that his conversion, if not mainly a matter of high politics, was at least extremely successful in protecting Poland from the ever-encroaching Germans, was indeed the only method by which her continued independence could be secured. The Germans, it has been said, regarded the heathen Poles as the Spanish Conquistadores regarded the Aztecs or the Incas—as pagans, human brutes without rights or standing in any court, whether earthly or heavenly. The position was entirely altered, however, when Mieszko accepted Christianity from Rome: formally accepted as a loyal son of the Church by the Pope, he became the equal of the German princes.

The story goes that the request of Mieszko for the hand of Dombrowka, daughter of Boleslaw king of Hungary, being met with the condition that he must become a Christian, he asked for instructors, and in 965 was married to the lady of his choice and baptized on the same day. He thereupon reformed his life and proceeded to convert his nobles, and then his people, being zealously seconded by his Queen and by clergy sent by Pope John XIII. After fourteen years spent in



proselytising activity, Mieszko ordained that everyone not yet baptized must submit to the rite forthwith, and was obeyed without resistance. The adoption of Christianity must have meant an immense change of life and manners, and a great amount of self-restraint and sacrifice of hitherto-permitted pleasures to people who had been given to every form of pagan depravity. Possibly it was felt in Rome that the reformation was only skin-deep, for Pope Benedict denied a kingly crown to Mieszko, though he granted the honour to his rival of Hungary. For the rest, Mieszko, the Ethelred of Poland, kept the powerful Russian Grand Duke Vladimir at bay, and he fought with some success against the Germans, though owning himself a vassal of the Emperor Otho III.

To Boleslaw I, The Brave,<sup>1</sup> should perhaps be given the credit of consciously arresting the recoil of his people before the vigorous attacks of the Germans by means of the power and prestige of the Church. His aim was to secure the political independence of Poland by securing her religious independence. To that end the Polish capital Gneszno was made the metropolitan see of Poland, and was consecrated by the removal to it of the bones of the martyred St. Adalbert of Prague. The metropolitan was given jurisdiction also over Cracow and Breslaw, cities conquered from Bohemia by Boleslaw, and over Kolberg in Pomerania, also a recent acquisition. Boleslaw the Brave was the first Polish prince to use the title of king, bestowed upon him by his overlord Otho III, and his sway extended roughly from the Elbe to the Bug and from the Baltic to the Carpathians.

These mountains were, however, Poland's only solid frontier, her only natural rampart, and her geographical weakness was accentuated by her political instability. She was not integrated by the strong regulating influences which moulded other nations. Feudalism, which bound the peoples by the obligation of military service to their lords, as they in their turn were bound to their sovereigns,

<sup>1</sup> Chobri = Lion-hearted.

never took root in Poland. She never had the training of Roman law and organisation which benefited Western nations ; nor had she, like Russia, the example of Byzantine administration and centralisation. The clan system was stronger in Poland than it was elsewhere, and survived to a later date, and so it came about that she easily fell back into division and anarchy when the hand of a firm ruler was removed.

This tendency was exemplified at the death of Boleslaw I. Though much exhausted by constant warfare during the quarter-century of his reign, old Poland was left by Boleslaw to his son a great and seemingly well-consolidated kingdom. But Mieszko II was a confirmed voluptuary, and under his slothful and heedless rule Poland fell before a combined assault of all her enemies. A pagan reaction almost wiped out her Christianity and threw her back into barbarism. Her complete extinction seemed at hand : but fortunately the Russian Grand Duke Yaroslav, the most formidable of her invaders, contented himself with carrying off all the booty he could transport, and all the prisoners he could guard, for sale in the infamous slave-marts of the Crimea. The Poles, almost despairing, sent for Mieszko's son from the monastery where his mother had placed him for safety, and Casimir I justified his title of The Restorer by pacifying the country and repelling its foes. The rebuilding of Poland was carried on by Boleslaw II and Boleslaw III. Lost provinces were recovered, and headway was made against paganism, Pomerania, until then untouched by Christianity, being converted in the reign of Boleslaw III.

This period saw a very important step in the making of Poland, namely, the introduction of a trading middle class, and with it the development of commerce. Every Pole was by right of race a gentleman, if neither he nor his fathers had ever engaged in commercial pursuits. But it is not difficult to see that no state could advance much beyond the first stages of civilisation where only those who had lost caste would become traders or merchants.

For import of goods unknown at home, and export of surplus products in exchange, appears to be the chief ladder of progress, and is besides necessitated in these latitudes, as we all know, by conditions of climate and soil: only cave-dwellers were ever completely self-sufficing in Northern or Central Europe. Therefore it was, no doubt, all to the good for the Poles that during these two reigns a great influx of Jews took place.

In Poland the Jews found personal safety and a means of making a livelihood denied to them elsewhere. For this was the age of the Crusades, and the lawless and disorderly mobs that followed in the train of Peter the Hermit and Walter the Penniless (1096) expended the first of their crusading zeal in the massacre in Germany of some 12,000 Jews. These fanatics held that the infidels of Europe claimed their attention before those of Asia, and acted upon their belief. A second massacre was only prevented during the next Crusade (1146) by the influence of St. Bernard. Later the Polish Jews found a patron in Casimir the Great, who bestowed on them what privileges and rights lay in his gift—no great matter in the case of a Polish king, even in his day.

The Jews settled in the Polish towns and had commerce and business almost exclusively in their hands. Their privileged status was recognised by law, but was often capriciously changed: sometimes they were boycotted, at others forbidden to trade in certain articles: but always they thrived and increased in numbers. If they were not liked by the Poles, they were at any rate tolerated and unmolested by them, and this was much in the Middle Ages.

Boleslaw II spent much time and treasure during the earlier part of his reign in putting his favourite candidates on the thrones of Hungary and Russia. In those times Poland had the best of reasons for such interference in the domestic concerns of other states. For the whole duty of kings then seemed to be the aggrandisement of their country at the expense of others. Poland occupied a middle position encircled by powerful foes, who invariably

took advantage of a weak king or of an interregnum to fall upon her and threaten her very existence. It was certainly to her interest to assist a friendly prince to a neighbouring throne when opportunity offered. And that was not seldom, for in those days all sons had an equal right to the inheritance, and settled who should be *primus inter pares* and 'father' of the others<sup>1</sup> by the 'trial of God,' the proof of the sword. Nay, may we not even go further and affirm that such a policy was one of reasonable political insurance, whether or no Boleslaw consciously so regarded it? Be this as it may, the Poles displayed more true patriotism and more common sense in dangerous situations at this period than they usually did later, and if they are accused of aggression on account of it, we may safely say at the least that they were no worse than their neighbours!

Boleslaw II, The Bold, was in the earlier part of his reign a great warrior, but the sloth and debauchery of his later years led to his excommunication by Stanislaw, Bishop of Cracow, and to the murder of that high-minded prelate by the king, who himself struck him down at the door<sup>2</sup> of his own church. Pope Gregory avenged the king's murder of an ecclesiastic by laying the kingdom under an Interdict. The miserable king disappeared, and though under his successor the Interdict was removed, Poland was reduced to a dukedom. Not until 1320 did the Papal See restore its prince to kingly rank.<sup>3</sup> Surely this is one of the most extreme instances in history of the high pretensions and the unrivalled power exercised by Holy Church. For over two hundred years Poland suffered a loss of rank because a prince in a passion laid violent hands on a bishop!

Boleslaw III was accounted the bravest warrior of his age, and was said to have been victorious in forty-seven

<sup>1</sup> This literally describes the power and status of the rulers of the old Russian principality of Kiev.

<sup>2</sup> Some accounts heighten the horror of the deed by saying that it was perpetrated at the altar.

<sup>3</sup> Duke Przemislav in 1296 had himself crowned, and used the title of king, as did his successors, though unauthorised by the Church.



pitched battles. Unfortunately, following the fatal fashion of the time, at his death the country was divided among his sons. Thence, until the beginning of the fourteenth century, we have the so-called Partitional Period during which Poland lost all political importance, and once more sank into the bog of anarchy out of which she had so often been lifted. The country was rent into small rival principalities quite unable to hold their own against enemies old and new. Among these petty states Little Poland enjoyed a sort of primacy, containing as it did Cracow, the largest and wealthiest city, the seat of the Senate and of such central government as the land possessed. No province or prince, however, was bound by the decision of any other, and the half-dozen provincial Diets, mostly composed of the smaller gentry, were constantly in revolt against the pretensions of the Senate or Council, where the chief magnates and privileged persons ruled. Thus Poland was in no case to defend her rights or to repel her foes.

And this state of matters was the more unfortunate because towards the middle of the Partitional Period a terrible new scourge appeared in Eastern Europe. The language of the Russian chroniclers who describe the coming of the bloodthirsty Tartar hordes depicts graphically their bewilderment and terror. 'For our sins came unknown tribes. . . . God alone knows who they are and whence they came out.' 'The pagan and godless Tartars, a host of shedders of Christian blood.' At first the princes returned defiant answers to the emissaries of 'the Tartar foreigners' who demanded tribute. 'When none of us remain, all will be yours,' they said. 'But it was too late to oppose the wrath of God,' laments the chronicler. Towns are one after another besieged and taken, and then the furies are let loose! For the Tartar rule is, complete extermination of the inhabitants of every place that resists. 'The accursed lawless ones' roll on like a flood or like a prairie fire across Russia; towns and cities fall or are surrendered; princes become vassals who retain their provinces as

tributaries. Presently the bounds of Russia are passed, and the Tartar hordes invade Poland and Hungary, nor do they lose their impetus until they reach the confines of Teutonic lands. Their resistance stiffens and they are successfully encountered, for the arrow and mace of the Asiatic nomads prove ineffective against the steel-clad knights of Germany. But they have now travelled far from their native Amur. Their first leader's creed that there should be but one ruler on earth as in heaven has given them an unwieldy empire almost indefinitely extended; they are occupied, too, with conquests in China and Persia: so they definitely withdraw their outposts and establish their western capital on the Volga: from it they keep the unfortunate Russians in subjection for two hundred years or more.

The Tartar attacks on Poland were not seemingly intended for its conquest: they were in the nature of raids, horribly destructive, almost annihilating to the life of any district visited by them. Resistance was hopeless to the deadly battalions of a numerous and mobile foe, in which every man was a mounted soldier under the absolute discipline of a despotic general, and which had the prestige of an unchecked career of conquest. They ravaged and massacred; princes and people alike fled or perished; their retirement left the land systematically pillaged and destroyed by fire. But after their departure the people left alive ventured back again, and the princes invited Germans to fill up the gaps in the population, many of whom took up derelict farms and repopulated ruined villages. These German immigrants were naturally offered certain advantages and privileges, and so were staunch supporters of their patrons the princes against the more unruly Polish elements. In process of time they amalgamated with the other inhabitants and became the first representatives of a Polish middle class—good Poles whose loyalty could be depended upon. These burghers had a right to representation in the Diets: but it was a right resented by the gentry, who at last achieved their disfranchisement, to the great detriment of stability



and sanity in the political sphere. This leavening of the always refractory Polish mass by the introduction of a docile and industrious population should have been an important step in the making of Poland had these new Poles been allowed to pull their due weight in the community.

It was far otherwise with the Knights of the Teutonic Order who made their appearance in the Baltic provinces early in the thirteenth century. They were in no sense makers of Poland—rather they were thorns in her side and their presence was an important factor in her destruction—but it is impossible to omit them in any account of the influences which acted on Poland.

The Order's headquarters were at Acre, where it was founded in 1191, and from them it fought the Saracens for a hundred years; but it desired also employment nearer home. In 1208 it received a congenial invitation from Duke Conrad of Mazovia, for he and his bishops had found themselves unable to cope with the wild heathen Prussians who were the terror of their northern borders. The Knights came and settled in West Prussia. Conrad made over the district of Kulm to them, probably little anticipating that, when their mission was accomplished and the Prussians were "converted"—by way mainly of extermination!—the Knights would remain, and so the Germany from which Poland was always guarding her western provinces would become securely established in her northern ones.

Very soon the German Knights of the Sword, who had been since 1201 or earlier spreading the Gospel by fire and sword in Livonia, were incorporated with the Teutonic Knights, and the influence of the latter was extended northwards. In 1230, by the Compact of Kruszwicz, their possessions were increased to the whole of the coast-wise district between Pomerania and Courland, and south as far as Thorn. Then, by an arrangement equally crafty and convenient, the lands thus acquired were surrendered to the Pope, and immediately returned to the Order as a fief of the Holy See. In this way the Knights gained

what was practically independence, for the Grand Master was invested 'with all the rights of a Prince of the Empire over all the Prussian Lands of which the Order might possess itself'—a very large order indeed! As a consequence of it, Poland was obliged in perennial warfare and on many a stricken field to assert her suzerainty over her troublesome vassals. Foreign poten-



- Polish frontier as fixed by the Conference of Ambassadors, March 15, 1923. This decision recognised the Treaty of Riga and confirmed Poland's possession of Vilna district and of East Galicia.
- ..... Previous Lithuanian frontier.

tates used them as pawns against Poland in the political game, and they were always ready to stab her in the back at critical moments.

We must now consider Poland's relations with the Lithuanians. This people is an interesting survival of a very ancient race, the oldest Aryan stock in Europe. Their language, which may be still heard comparatively

undiluted in the provinces of Wilno, Grodno and Witebsk, though in a welter of dialects and divisions, is the nearest in Europe to the sacred language of India, the Sanscrit of the Vedas. As spoken, it is a link between that tongue and Slavonic. At the present time the Lithuanians are a "quiet and rather depressed peasantry,"<sup>1</sup> farmers and fishers, perhaps not more than "a million altogether of pure Lithuanian blood." Yet in olden days they were 'the most terrible of all barbarians.' Livs and Esths were merely their prey, 'as sheep are the prey of wolves.' Before them Russians 'fled like hares before hunters.' Even the warrior knights of Prussia had little success against them, though backed by prince and king, by pope and emperor, and with unlimited wealth provided by the piety of Europe. The Lithuanians had, however, the shelter of an impracticable land, and the bond of a paganism even more deeply rooted than that of their neighbours the Prussians, the Livs and the Yaldzvingis—obstinate as these were in that regard. Is the root of the heathen fanaticism common to all these peoples to be found in the common aboriginal Finnish stock that must have been absorbed by them in all the Baltic lands? However that may be, it is a fact that the folk-songs and fables of the Lithuanians show an entirely pagan mentality, and are almost uncoloured by Christian religion or culture.<sup>2</sup> The Lithuanians were the last of the Baltic tribes to yield to Christianity, the last of Europeans.

They were only drawn from their seclusion and fancied security among the marshes of the upper Niemen by the menace of the Teutonic Knights in the thirteenth century. These ruthless soldiers of the Cross were busy, they knew, exterminating their neighbours the Prussians, and would soon, no doubt, turn their missionary zeal against them. As a measure of protection their prince, Ringold, joined their scattered clans into one government. He founded the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1235, and added to it provinces filched from Russia, then crumbling under

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Latham, *Nationalities of Europe*.

<sup>2</sup> For a further elucidation of this subject see page 225.

Mongol onslaughts. The Lithuanians soon proved that savage fury was not their only characteristic, nor their chief one. Ringold and his successors showed wonderful valour and enterprise, and backed them up with far-seeing, tenacious and prudent statesmanship. Prince Mindovg followed the example of former Polish rulers in like danger of German absorption. As a checkmate to the Knights he was baptized and submitted to Rome, while in return the Pope elevated Lithuania into a bishopric and bestowed a crown upon Mindovg. That wily prince, however, relapsed into heathenism when he found later that that would protect his country from the Mongols who were ravaging Russia, a Christian land. He extended his Grand Duchy over Black Russia and Plock, in a deep wedge between Russia and Poland.

Gedymin, The Conqueror, annexed Kiev and Little Russia. His advent was not unwelcome to the conquered provinces. We are told by a Russian chronicler that it 'freed them at once from the crushing yoke of the Mongols and from their own eternal civil strife.' Gedymin was a reforming civilising prince. He built towns and invited German artisans and mechanics to them, and to his new capital at Wilnos (Vilna). Though himself a pagan, he contrived to induce the Pope to restrain the Knights. He pleased his Catholic Polish neighbours by permitting Franciscan and Dominican missionaries to preach to his people, while on the other hand he allied his family by marriage with the Russian royal house and allowed his son to embrace Orthodoxy and to build Orthodox churches in the land. No wonder that the people remained consistently pagan when they observed the religious mutations of their princes!

Olgerd defeated Novgorod, whose mayor had offended him—'barked at him,' called him 'a hound'—and penetrated almost to Moscow, then becoming the centre of Russian nationality. He moved forward over the steppe, subdued Podolia and the whole Dnieper basin, raided the Crimea and destroyed Old Kherson, a very ancient Greek colony on the site of Sevastopol. Under



him the loosely compacted confederacy of Lithuania, with its huge colonial empire for the most part torn from Russia, gained its greatest extension. It lay in a great oblong, widest in the north, between the Baltic and Black Seas, each of which it touched just at one point. It cut the possessions of the Teutonic Order in two, separating East Prussia from Courland and Livonia, and it completely separated Russia from Poland—though not for long, as we shall see, for it behoves us now to bring Polish history forward to this time.

We shall not give any details about the feeble reigns of the princes of the Partitional Period: they had no hand in the making of Poland. Their line came to an end with a princess who married King Wenceslaw of Bohemia. This marriage brought about a short-lived union which foreshadowed that between Lithuania and Poland. Wenceslaw, however, offended his new subjects by in all things favouring his old ones, whom he enriched at their expense. He filled Government posts with Bohemians instead of Poles—and Chech and Lech hated each other the better for it!—and he quartered foreign troops upon the country. So the Poles cast him out, and reinstated Wladislaw I, The Short, whom they had before dethroned on account of his arrogance and arbitrariness. He united the Polish palatinates under one sceptre, and was recognised by the Pope as king of Poland.

As we have seen, Poland was regarded by the Germans as a fief of the Empire: its kings had recognised this status when compelled to do so, and ignored it when they could. The claim fell into complete disuetude during the strong reign of Wladislaw I, to whom Poland thus owed a double debt of gratitude, for her unity and for her *de jure* independence. But during the dismal Partitional times her western frontiers had receded. Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, had all ceased to be in any way connected with a Slav State; the Elbe was no longer a Polish boundary; the Oder no longer a Polish river. Wladislaw, however, by his successful dealings with Bohemians and Branden-

burghers, and above all with the Knights whom he severely defeated for the first time at Plowce, lifted the Poles out of the slough of despond in which they had so long weltered, and made them again a European Power. His dying advice to his son Casimir III showed where he thought the main danger lay. "Rather," he said, "bury yourself under the ruins of your throne than suffer (the Knights) to possess the territory they have invaded."

Casimir III, The Great, fortunately for Poland, was more a statesman than a soldier, and his long and successful reign gave her a rest from warfare, which she much needed. He married Anne, daughter of Gedymin of Lithuania, and the bride is said to have brought with her some 24,000 Poles who had been slaves in Lithuania, which, however exaggerated the figure may be, gives some measure of the miseries entailed by the constant warfare of those days.

Poland owed its first law-code to Casimir. Hitherto two sets of laws had obtained in Poland. The cities and the neighbouring villages that came under their jurisdiction had been under German law, while the nobles and peasants had been governed more or less by tradition or usage, and by the whims of the magnates, who were supreme in their own provinces. At an Assembly convened for the purpose regulations universally obligatory were framed. All without distinction were subjected to the same courts, and all were confirmed in their property and rights. Peasants could, as before, live where they pleased, could purchase their holdings, and could even rise to noble rank. But wrong done to a peasant was held to be done also to his lord, who was by it deprived of his services, and who therefore shared the fine imposed on the wrong-doer. The distinction between ranks was very marked. A peasant's life was valued at 10 marks; a "privileged" peasant's at 15; a squire's at 30; a great noble's at 60. In process of time, however, most of these distinctions were done away. The two classes of peasants and nobles only were left, with the relatively unimportant



burgher class between, which still retained to a certain extent the protection of Magdeburg law<sup>1</sup> 'for the encouragement of industry and the arts.' Casimir lavished favours on the Jews,<sup>2</sup> whom no doubt he considered valuable members of the community. He was a great patron of industry, and invited many foreign artisans and architects to Poland. With their help he introduced building with brick instead of wood, and fortified the towns as a protection against Tartar raids. He also encouraged learning, founded a great library at Cracow, and built many hospitals, churches and schools.

In all these matters Casimir was a maker of Poland, but he introduced other changes of more questionable value. Until this period the higher clergy and great nobles only were members of the legislature, and were summoned at the king's will. The monarchy of the Piasts was thus very nearly an absolute one. But Casimir often admitted also inferior clergy, burgher deputies and lesser nobles, all of whom deliberated on even the most important affairs. For example, Casimir had no son, and he consulted the Diet as to his successor, proposing his nephew, Louis of Hungary. After lengthened debate the Diet accepted the suggestion, but a deputation was sent to Louis to make a bargain with him in limitation of the royal prerogative, which he was obliged to sign or forgo the crown. In itself this action of the Diet seems reasonable enough, but by it a formal precedent was set up for the election of kings, and the way paved for that domination of the country by the very numerous body of ignorant and fantastically individualistic country gentry, the development of which ultimately destroyed the constitution of Poland and led to its political downfall.

Louis, who in due course succeeded his uncle, was very popular in his own country, where the Hungarians called him The Great. But the Poles hated him and kept up chronic warfare against the regents by whom he governed

<sup>1</sup> Magdeburg law secured the administrative independence of municipalities whose constitutions were based on that of Magdeburg.

<sup>2</sup> He is said to have done so to please his beautiful mistress, the Jewess Esther.

and exploited Poland. He was an absentee king both by preference and of necessity, and his reign is now chiefly memorable because he relinquished all claim to Silesia. Pomerania had long been German, and from this time Poland's interests lay rather in Eastern than in Western Europe, an orientation soon confirmed. For the Poles cast off their allegiance to Louis, brought back Casimir's daughter Jadwiga from exile in Hungary, and in 1382 proclaimed her their Queen. Within a few years this princess, young, beautiful and wealthy, queen in her own right of a powerful nation, was married to the Lithuanian Grand Duke Iagailo.<sup>1</sup> It cannot have seemed a great match to her, and it was a very repugnant one<sup>2</sup>—the bridegroom was small, ugly, ignorant, a pagan clad in skins, and above all very jealous—but it is usually considered to have been one of the most fortunate of royal marriages. Poland then united with Lithuania in a bond which held, albeit often precariously, and became ever firmer as the generations passed.

Iagailo was baptized Wladislaw II when he married Jadwiga, and from that time the Lithuanians gradually gave up paganism. But for this marriage and the union it cemented, Lithuania—which owned leagues of genuine Russian territory whose people were, of course, Orthodox—might sooner or later have united with Russia: to the majority of its inhabitants such a union might have been more natural than one with Poland, and it was a constantly pursued object of Russian policy. The fact remains, however, that from 1386 Lithuania shared in the culture and prestige of Poland, now arrived at full stature and without a serious rival among the Slav races.

The united kingdom of Lithuania-Poland was, under the descendants of Jagiello and Jadwiga, the dominant Power in East Central Europe during the Renaissance and Reformation epochs. It held the Muscovite in check;

<sup>1</sup> Iagailo = James; it is the Lithuanian form, as Jagiello is the Polish, Jagellon, the name usually given to the dynasty founded in Poland by this prince, is a German rendering of the name.

<sup>2</sup> She was, and had long been, very sincerely in love with Prince William of Austria, and they found it very hard to give each other up.

it prevented further annexations of European soil by Turk or Tartar ; it shattered the power of the Teutonic Knights, won West Prussia and Courland from them, and definitely stopped German advances on the Baltic shores. It only gave way in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries before the rising might and expanding energy of the Russia of the Tsars and the Prussia of the Hohenzollern Electors.

## V

### THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION UNDER THE JAGIELLOS

ACCORDING to most authorities Poland reached the acme of her power and influence under Casimir the Great. At that time she surpassed other nations in unity and organisation, in religious toleration and in intellectual activity. She then also definitely introduced the beginnings of a government so democratic as to be for many generations without a rival in Europe. The kingdom which the first Jagiello received was Poland at practically her greatest, a pioneer in liberalism and culture about to enter upon her Golden Age. In the Jagiellonic epoch Poland's peculiar genius was in full flower;<sup>1</sup> but before it expired she had passed through the constitutional revolution which stereotyped her faith and culture, enfeebled her executive, and finally left her as far behind other nations as she had formerly been in advance of them.

This declension was chiefly due to elements of weakness within the state, one of which was the restricted caste basis on which its superstructure rested. It was verily an apex which supported a pyramid! For upon the king and greater nobles alone lay all the functions of government and of defence in a land whose flanks were extremely vulnerable. Casimir, as we have seen, introduced other elements—called the lesser nobles and burgesses to the Diets—but that did little to broaden the basis of the state, and we shall find that the gentry so introduced soon constituted another and a stronger caste tyranny, and correspondingly weakened the executive.

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the literature of this period see page 214 *et seq.*

Even the union with Lithuania had grave disadvantages to qualify its gains.

1. It brought Poland into immediate contact with Muscovy. That state naturally regarded all the Russian part of Lithuania as its own patrimony, as lands which it must try to recover when opportunity offered. Muscovy and Poland thus became potential enemies, though the quarrel did not develop for two centuries.

2. By this union Poland entered into partnership with peoples inferior to her own in culture, and received a mass of subjects in the southern provinces (which she eventually took over from Lithuania) whom she could not absorb, so tenaciously did they cling to their religion and nationality. Her peasants<sup>\*</sup> flowed out in their thousands to the thinly populated lands of Volhynia, Podolia, the Ukraine and other provinces that had once been Russian, and there her great lords received properties far too large in extent for individual management. This outer colonial empire never became truly Polish, and during the state's decline was even more ill-governed than Poland proper.

3. By this territorial expansion the lines of Poland's naturally unprotected eastern frontier were enormously extended. There lay the formidable Tartar hordes whose business was rapine and destruction. Russia had gone down before them, and was now existing on sufferance as it were, tributary and cowed, as yet quite unable to make headway against them. The whole labour of defence, and that not only of her own lands but of Europe generally, fell first on Hungary, who sustained it practically alone until her military power was destroyed by the Turks at the Battle of Mohacs in 1526. Poland had always been on the defensive against these marauders as far as her own soil and commerce were concerned. After Russia's eclipse, followed by Hungary's disaster, the protection of Christendom was perforce taken up by her. This grave military responsibility rested upon one class only—

<sup>\*</sup> Mostly descendants of immigrants from Russia who were Orthodox and took the opportunity of returning to the land of their fathers.



the nobility—and numerous though it was, the burden was excessive. Poland's manhood was unduly depleted and her substance spent in frontier wars—wars which nevertheless were unavoidable if she were to continue in being.

Another factor in the weakening of Poland during the Jagiellonic period was the impoverishment which overtook the country when the stream of commerce, which had been set flowing by the crusades, dried up.<sup>1</sup> Poland was the continental channel of that trade, and its diversion caused a serious economic revolution:<sup>2</sup> it turned her into a predominantly agricultural state. Only the high nobility gained by the change, and that at the expense of the people at large, for they very soon turned the peasants into serfs and deprived the town population of political and economic rights and privileges, where these competed with their own.

Thus we find that the union with Lithuania, while it increased Poland's military strength and her population, and more than doubled her territory, rendered her less homogeneous, brought her into actual contact with Muscovites, Tartars and Turks, and thus disproportionately extended her military commitments. We find also that the high civilisation of old Poland, her government, her defence, her very being, all rested on a small proportion of the people: it was without sufficiently broad foundations, whether in men or in material prosperity, to ensure its continuance, and it was not supported by sufficiently strong and coherent political and economic systems to compensate for its other weaknesses.

As formerly related, it was the last of the Piast dynasty, Casimir III, who introduced democratic ideas and practices into the Diet, and the Poles learned their lesson very quickly. Privileges with them soon grew into rights. The Jagiellos, who succeeded the Piasts, are called a dynasty, and certainly seven of them reigned one after another, but each succeeded by the choice

<sup>1</sup> The Knights also impeded commerce by imposts levied on goods from Poland passing through Dantzic.

<sup>2</sup> For a further discussion of this subject see page 166 *et seq.*

or election of the people. John Albert, for example, third son of Casimir IV, was elected king by the Senate and representatives of the chief cities in preference to his eldest brother, who was already king of Hungary and Bohemia. Sigismund I was first elected by Lithuania, and then received a Polish deputation which offered him the crown. The last of the Jagiellos was chosen as his father's successor eighteen years before the latter's death. Thus, though the succession was confined to one family, the crown was really elective, and the powers even of the Jagiellos were more and more circumscribed by the hard bargains that their thrifty subjects drove with them as the price of support. A few examples<sup>1</sup> will amply illustrate and prove this.

We left the Knights of the Teutonic Order securely established in Poland's Prussian provinces, where they proved to be the hardest of taskmasters. Though in the great days of the Hansa they were an important commercial and maritime Power, their dominions were organised on strictly military lines and regardless of civilian interests as such. As they found themselves obliged to increase taxation, their purely tyrannical government became unendurable: they were no longer a sure defence to their subjects, but a potential danger. At last they were obliged to grant their discontented people a Landtag, though one with very restricted powers. Out of it grew the Prussian League, which in 1454 renounced its allegiance to the Order and offered the Prussian lands and fortresses to Casimir IV of Poland. He formally annexed them and proposed to take the field and eject the Knights from the remainder also.

The opportunity was unique. Many of the towns, including Thorn and Elbing, were ready to receive Casimir, and all were disaffected to their masters. He summoned the Polish militia to arms, and had they responded as they ought the war would have been short and decisive. But the inland provinces did not appreciate the benefits that would flow from the complete

<sup>1</sup> These examples are chiefly based on Bain's *Slavonic Europe*.

control of the Polish rivers Vistula and Niemen ; from the recovery of a free sea-board with its opportunities of unrestricted ocean-borne commerce ; above all, from the elimination of an alien element which had always been more or less of a festering sore in the body politic. Great Poland, however, responded willingly :<sup>\*</sup> it was coterminous with Prussia and its squires understood. But before even they would move the king had to sign numerous articles confirming or enlarging their privileges. They turned out to be too few for the work and were defeated—but the one-sided bargain held ! The same process had then to be followed with Little Poland, with the same results. The effect was that many of the Prussian towns, seeing the military weakness caused by the disunion of the Poles, renounced their new allegiance, and Casimir had to engage Chech mercenaries with whom to subject them afresh. But these foreigners had to be paid, and the Senate, after weeks of wordy warfare, voted a 2 per cent. tax on property to be levied by arrangement with the local Diets, to each of which direct application had to be made by the king. The local bodies were inclined to be mutinous, and granted the subsidy only on condition that commissioners should have the management of it. Even then the sum so painfully obtained proved to be quite inadequate, and Casimir, who had already spent his private fortune on the war, was obliged to supplement it by loans. Finally the gentry voted a 5 per cent. land-tax on the understanding that they should not personally be liable for further service in this war. With this money Casimir was enabled to hire a sufficient army, and the Knights' submission was ratified by the Peace of Thorn. But the victory was only a partial triumph for Poland. The fatal blindness and parsimony of the noblesse had handicapped the king's efforts at every turn, and the Knights, who might easily have been expelled, were left in possession of almost half of their original territory.

<sup>\*</sup> Dantzic also supplied men and arms to the limit of its capacity : it had suffered much under the Knight's rapacity.

The position of the gentry was further exalted during the short reign of the ever-impecunious John Albert. He decided to summon a central Diet (Sejm),<sup>1</sup> and so get a national levy arranged without the disagreeable necessity of appealing to each of the half-dozen local Diets (Sejmiki) individually. At the first of these Sejms held in 1493, after confirmation of the privileges of the upper orders, a paltry sum was voted, and soon fresh supplies were required. Meantime the gentry had thought out new demands which had to receive the sanction of law before any money was voted. These statutes, among other things, exempted the gentry from all tolls and dues of a similar kind, and thus favoured them at the expense of other classes; they forced the burgesses to sell any land they might possess outside the town walls, and forbade them ever to acquire any, which enactment excluded them from military service with its attendant social advantages and prestige; they confined the higher offices of the Church (with the exception of three generously reserved for plebeians!) to the sons of noble families; and, worst of all, this Diet of 1496 forbade agricultural labourers to migrate in search of better wages or conditions. The nobility was thus elevated into a caste apart, with privileges which directly impoverished the other classes and undermined their loyalty and public spirit. At the same time an excise duty paid only by burgesses, and a subsidy from the lands held for the most part by the peasantry, were the only contributions made by it to the national exchequer: those who were the only gainers by its enactments contributed nothing.

Alexander was equally impecunious and personally more unfortunate. The dealings of the Diet with him took the form of restrictions of the royal prerogative. The bargains forced upon him, among other things, exempted members of the Senate from prosecution in the Royal Courts; took the control of the mint from the Crown, to which it had been a source of revenue; forbade the king to mortgage the royal estates (as had often been

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Same.



done to raise money in emergencies) without the unanimous consent of the Senate in full session ; provided a permanent council, whose members the king could not dismiss, to be always in attendance, and enacted that the principal officers of state should be appointed only with the assent of the Senate in full session. Finally, Alexander was obliged in 1505 to promise that neither he nor his successors should enact any new statute or alter the constitution without the consent previously given of the whole Diet, and it was arranged that all disbursements of public money should be scrutinised by commissioners appointed for the purpose. These were on the whole reasonable arrangements, for the Jagiellos, and Alexander in particular, were careless and lavish ; but unfortunately the councillors and commissioners appointed were quite unfitted for their duties. Sigismund I, however, was a capable man of commanding personality who was able to keep his refractory subjects in hand. He and his successor possessed in the highest degree the sagacious tactful patience of their house. During their sixty years they restored the financial health of Poland, and revived and maintained her ascendancy.

This was exemplified in the case of the Teutonic Knights, who had taken advantage of Poland's weakness to rise against her, and were soundly beaten. The Reformation was at this time in progress. In spite of his Catholicism, the Grand Master was an admirer of Lutheranism,<sup>1</sup> and he won over most of the Knights to his views. The few conservatives who remained removed their Chapter to Mergentheim in Würtemberg, where the Order quietly hibernated until the time of Napoleon. Albert and his knights became Protestants, renounced their allegiance to the Pope, married, and cut up East Prussia into secular hereditary estates for themselves. Then, in April, 1525, an interesting and dramatic ceremony took place in Cracow. Sigismund I, enthroned in state, received from the Grand Master, his nephew, the surrender of the banner of the Order and of its possessions, only at

<sup>1</sup> It is said that Luther himself advised him to the course he adopted.



once to return them to Albert, whom he created Duke of Prussia, and who, with his knights, become secular vassals of Poland, kissed the king's hand in token of fealty.

It was to a representative of the acquisitive house of Hohenzollern that Poland herself thus presented the province of East Prussia! To unite it with the rest of their dominions became thenceforth a main object of their policy and was the prepotent cause of Poland's ultimate downfall.

In 1561 the Grand Master of the northern section of the Knights, the Sword-Bearers, followed Albert's example, and as Duke of Courland became a secular vassal of Poland. In this way she gained an enlarged, if precarious, footing on the Baltic sea-board—*malgré lui*—for Sigismund II carried through this transaction as Duke of Lithuania: Poland proper would accept no responsibility for it, and very wisely. For the possession of these far-off Baltic lands added no real strength to Poland. Instead it turned Russia and Sweden, who both coveted Livonia and Courland, into jealous and unfriendly neighbours, and led to many decades of obscure fighting in country that was seldom without the clash of arms. Finally, Russia gained the disputed territory, and with it that access to the sea which was an important agent in her civilisation.

Theoretically the constitution of Poland was a very perfect one: it was undoubtedly the most liberal in Europe until quite recent times. It only needed that the elements of which it was composed should be gifted with political sense and sobriety, but that was far from being the case! It consisted,<sup>1</sup> like our own, of king, Lords (the Senate) and Commons (the so-called Equestrian Order).

The members of the Senate, also, like our second chamber, a close corporation, were the higher clergy to the number of 17; 33 Palatines or governors of provinces;

<sup>1</sup> Rousseau, in his *Considérations sur la Gouvernement de la Pologne*, says that the three orders of the Republic were the nobles who were everything, the burgesses who were nothing, and the peasants who were less than nothing!

and 85 Castellans, originally commanders of royal cities or fortresses appointed by the king, but now become independent of him.

The Sejm, or Diet, which did not meet regularly much before the sixteenth century, was held for a few weeks at intervals of two years. At first the members of the Sejm were nominated by the crown: towards the end of the reign of Sigismund I they were regularly sent as representatives of the Sejmiki, of which there was one in every province. These met before the Sejm itself, originally for the transaction of local business only, later also for the appointment of deputies whose line of policy in the Sejm was dictated and absolutely determined beforehand by the Sejmik. The meetings of both Sejm and Sejmik were riotous assemblies where the partisans of great magnates, or of rival localities, came armed and ready to vindicate their independence. Assent, first in the Sejmik and later in the Sejm, must be unanimous, and occasionally unanimity was obtained by the expulsion or assassination of a recalcitrant member or minority. The theory was that all Polish gentlemen were free and equal, and that it did not consist with his dignity for one to surrender his opinion to another: the will of each one in particular must prevail. Parties and party loyalty were unknown. Deputies might support particular leaders or follow their policies, but of their own free choice, and for so long only as they remained of the same mind.

It followed that as in most provinces small landowners—the Szlachta—were in the majority, they soon came to dominate the legislature. Their number was reinforced and their peculiar cast of mind much strengthened by the incorporation of Mazovia with Poland on the extinction of its ducal house in 1526, for in Mazovia the squires were very numerous and exceptionally democratic. It soon became the ruling passion of the Szlachta to limit the authority of the executive in every direction, of which instances have been given above, and to reduce the great magnates—the Pans—to their level. To this end a law was passed making military service compulsory on all “legal” Poles, irrespective of position. This in itself

was a reasonable measure, and it much increased the number of those who could be called to the colours, for every gentleman had to provide troops in proportion to his fortune. The same cannot be said for other enactments which forbade the Grand Hetman<sup>1</sup> to levy troops, the Lord Treasurer to collect taxes, the Grand Chancellor to direct the law courts, duties which had hitherto devolved upon these functionaries and which the Sejm now took over, with the king as its deputy between its sittings. Evidently the Sejm desired to be the hand as well as the brain of the Government, and to gather all authority to itself. By its intromissions, as it has been well put, the king had been deprived of almost all his prerogatives, and the commonalty was becoming more and more a "rightless rabble of wretched peasants, impoverished burghers and chaffering Jews."

There can be no question that what was practically a revolution had taken place in Poland even before the crown became *de jure* elective. The centre of gravity had passed from the great lords and officials with the king at their head to the Szlachta or country squires, whose jealousy of the upper orders was unappeasable, and who gradually usurped more and more power until all turned on them. The danger—and it was very real—lay in the centrifugal tendency of the individualistic Polish gentry, their fear lest they should lose their privileges if at any time they gave the Senate or the king a free rein. Left to them, Poland would have fallen back into a congeries of tribal states all pulling different ways, as in the Partitional Period. Only the link of the crown, seemingly, held the country together. As the Primate Krzyski wrote to Sigismund I: "All of us know right well . . . that if Your Majesty did not rule this body politic, like as the soul of a man ruleth his members, we should all fall to pieces."

The theory of government was quite different in Lithuania, where the hereditary Grand Duke was absolute,

<sup>1</sup> Hetman = Captain. It is by some derived from the German *Hauptmann*. Polish and Lithuanian Hetmans were heads of the military administration and Commanders-in-Chief.

and the Senate, which consisted of officials, had full legislative power. Members of the Senate must be Catholic in religion, and Catholics were privileged and given great estates, while everything was done socially and politically to depress Orthodox believers. They were not, however, subject to persecution: Sigismund I and Sigismund II insisted that all creeds should be equal before the law.

The great hindrance to advance in Lithuania was the heterogeneous nature of its population and of its institutions, and the incomplete nature of its union with Poland which for generations prevented its profiting as it might have done from the more advanced civilisation of the latter. There were at least four contending religions, for paganism still lingered in remote districts. The population was mixed. Lithuanians predominated in the country in Lithuania proper; Poles, Jews and Russians in the towns. In the conquered southern provinces there were practically no Lithuanians. They were populated by a mass of peasantry Russian in origin and Orthodox in religion, with as masters the Catholic Polish land-owners, who had divided the largely depopulated and devastated country into huge estates for themselves. To this day the Poles form in Podolia, Polesie and Volhynia an average of 8 per cent. of the population, while an average of 50 per cent. of the land is in their hands.

Lithuania also was seldom free from war—usually that most destructive kind of war, border forays and raids, which decides nothing but keeps the sore ever open and leads to reprisals and vendettas. She had standing quarrels with Muscovy: her contests with that Power over Livonia, Novgorod and other border territories never ceased, and they were, as a rule, carried on independently of Poland. Casimir IV devoted himself even more assiduously to Lithuanian affairs than he did to Polish; and rightly, for Lithuania was the more exposed of the two, and the more easily offended and restive. Though she realised her cultural inferiority, she took a pride in her glorious military exploits, and would tolerate no Polish interference. It was to Poland's credit that



she managed incorporated peoples so well as she did, and perhaps rather surprising in view of her temperament. They were not hurried, but, in the case of the Lithuanians, kept their own institutions and their rights of self-government until they were ready to surrender them; in the case of the Germans, kept their own language, which they were entitled to use even in Polish law-courts. Their susceptibilities were not wounded; they were led, not driven. The toleration of the Poles enabled them to assimilate other peoples as they would never have done by a rigid system of polonisation. When they tried something of the kind later among the Ukrainian peasants, they failed; they alienated the people, and in the end they lost the country.

It was not an easy task to get the two yoke-fellows, Poland and Lithuania, to pull together: it taxed the statesmanship of their rulers to the utmost. Neither was it easy to get the so-called union of hearts, brought about at Horodlo where both parties swore to a pact of eternal friendship, transformed into a secure political union. The Lithuanian magnates were afraid that they would be swamped among the numerous Polish lords, and up to the last moment opposed complete union with Poland. It was only their dread of incorporation with Muscovy and the statesmanship of the king, Sigismund II, which finally overcame their reluctance. The Jagiellos had from first to last to exercise exceeding patience, tact and impartiality in their dealings with the two states, and had, after many days, their reward. The last of the dynasty saw the complete and inseparable union of Poland and Lithuania accomplished at Lublin nearly two hundred years after Jadwiga had married Jagiello—and only three years before his own death!

Two only of the Jagiellos fell below the singularly high standard of statesmanship characteristic of their family. But those two, who between them reigned for no more than fourteen years (1492–1506), yet reigned long enough and at a time sufficiently critical to undermine the foundations of the state by allowing one class unduly to



aggrandise itself and to depress all the other elements of the commonwealth. Though the decadence of Poland thus unfortunately began during this period, yet we may on review fairly claim for the Jagiellos that they did well for Poland. The dynasty was in fact the greatest asset that she gained by her union with Lithuania. By their tact, sagacity and patient steadfastness these sovereigns succeeded in welding together discordant elements, provinces predominantly Polish, Lithuanian or German, with different religions, different traditions and ideals. Under them, moulded by their remarkably continuous influence, a great state grew up, in which amicable union took the place of fratricidal strife. They were men very much of one type, statesmen of the same stamp, whose quiet persistence, which never degenerated into obstinacy, enabled them to lead even the turbulent Poles and the restive and suspicious Lithuanians along paths of their choosing. 'Things here ever befall according to his wishes' was the testimony of the Austrian Envoy to Sigismund II. The 'most indocile of nations' responded to skilful handling.

It is possible that had the Jagellon dynasty lasted Poland might have attained to what then seemed to be her destiny—hegemony over the Slav races, leadership in the Slav world. And what might that not have meant for mankind! Western culture in Eastern Europe instead of Oriental exclusiveness and contented ignorance; freedom instead of autocracy; democratic institutions instead of bureaucratic tyrannies; a crowned Republic instead of a Tsarist State! But the directing hand of a family strong, politic, and on the whole successful, was removed; all the separatist and anarchical tendencies of the Polish nobility were unchained; under Jesuit guidance the national temper became reactionary and tolerance ceased for a time to be a Polish characteristic. The seeds of trouble were there, and germinated rapidly in the disintegrating conditions caused by an elective system under which a foreign prince, without knowledge of the people and out of sympathy with their ideals, too often filled the throne.

## VI

### POLAND'S DECLINE UNDER THE ELECTIVE MONARCHY

WE have now arrived, in the course of our studies of the Polish nationality, at the period usually known as that of its decadence. During this period Poland's disintegration, political and social, proceeded with fatal and ever-increasing rapidity. Some of the causes of this political instability, such as the oligarchical nature of her polity and her impoverishment both in men and money, have already been traced. They existed like disease-germs in her system: but they might have remained latent dangers only, or might in time have been eliminated had conditions been favourable. But the elective principle, formally adopted in 1572, was a great and serious source of political weakness to Poland. It was the very worst system a people with the Polish personal and racial pride and individualism could have chosen for their government. Indeed, the word "system" is hardly appropriate, for Poland chose her kings in an entirely haphazard manner. There were practically only two occasions when anything like unanimity of opinion was exhibited—the elections of Wladislaw IV and John Sobieski. Divided counsels in the election field naturally led to divided counsels in administration, and prevented the growth of that patriotic feeling and of loyalty to king and country whose unifying influence is so strong, and which makes, as nothing else does, for political stability and permanence.

The political theory and practice of Poland from the fifteenth century onwards was, indeed, unique in Europe.

It was thus expounded by Modrzewski<sup>1</sup> in the sixteenth : " It concerns kings to know that they are set up for the people, and not the people for them. The authority they wield over the nation is given them, not for themselves, but for it." This conception of kingship led in Poland, where moderation was an unknown virtue, to the humiliation of the kings, to the disappearance one after another of their powers, and at the same time to an extreme of individualism in her governing class. And, after her paradoxical manner, Poland weakened her executive during the centuries when other nations strengthened theirs. Some, like Hungary and Sweden for instance, substituted a dynastic for an elective monarchy ; others, like France and Russia, underwent a process of consolidation and centralisation, the nobles being forced to yield up their powers and privileges to the monarch. The position of the Polish kings, on the other hand, became in process of time more or less that of crowned slaves, not only without power, but subject to checks and restraints, to interference and defiance, to onerous conditions of every kind, imposed by their nominal subjects. In the words of Stanislaw Leszczyński, sometime king of Poland, the monarchs had only the " titulam vanum et nomen inane " of power, and more than one of them laid down his sceptre<sup>2</sup> in very weariness and disgust. A crowned republic seems in these latter days an ideal form of government for the British Empire : but it was far too feeble and too decentralised efficiently to protect Poland, situated as she was between great expanding empires whose dearest ambition was to annex her provinces and suppress her nationality ; empires which were, year by year, becoming more militarist and more ruthlessly bent on aggrandisement.

Theoretically, in Poland, as in them, the sovereign was the executive head of the state, his consent being required

<sup>1</sup> Modrzewski published his chief work, *On the Reform of the Republic*, in 1551. His books, written in Latin, show wide tolerance and political insight.

<sup>2</sup> When this happened a second time a law was passed forbidding the abdication of a king. The galley-slave was chained to his oar !

for legislation, his initiative for policy ; but in her case the theory worked out quite differently. Why ? Because the Pole would not be ruled contrary to his will ; because he called no man his superior ; because he went to the election field prepared to vote only as he thought fit, and to shackle the candidate he chose to be king lest the privileges and immunities of Polish gentlemen should be endangered ; and because he was in foreign politics essentially a pacifist. Military glory as such did not attract him, and his country had no need of territorial expansion. Writers like Modrzewski, who expressed his opinions, denounced wars of conquest as "unjust." Self-interest was not in their eyes a legitimate object of a nation's policy. This idealism prevented the setting up in Poland of a predatory state after the fashion of the Prussia of Frederick or the Russia of Catherine. Loyalty to a king was not, indeed, part of a Pole's mental outfit. As M. Walisewski<sup>1</sup> truly says, there was nothing of Divine Right in the title of a Polish king : no monarch was less able to assert credibly, "L'Etat c'est moi." Royal plans of plunder or of gain at their neighbours' expense almost invariably failed for want of popular support. The gentry kept the purse-strings in their own hands, and very often showed themselves parsimonious where one thinks that they might very well have relaxed their constant vigilance. "L'Etat c'est nous," they might have claimed without exaggeration.

On another side also the elective monarchy was a source of Polish weakness. Most states pursued their way from generation to generation on a road consciously chosen, and capable of being unfalteringly followed, because the traditions of their statecraft were those of one house and of stable governments which could carry out their policy unhindered by the movements of public opinion. Poland's course, unlike theirs, was really a drift, and incalculable. Her monarchy was dynastic neither in theory as heretofore, nor in practice ; her policy was blown about by every wind of impulse. She

<sup>1</sup> In *Poland the Unknown*.



was swayed by Christian idealism; by repugnance to warlike exertion; by growing conservatism and inefficiency. She allowed herself of set purpose to remain ignorant of the policy of her neighbours and indifferent to the doctrine of the Balance of Power, with its implications so threatening to herself. How could states adversely affected by its swayings regain their equipoise more easily or profitably than at the expense of Poland—unsuspicious, practically undefended, and conveniently situated? But Poland did not see, or; seeing, did not heed, that she was bound to be the victim of that fetish of European statesmen, the Balance of Power. She credited other states with an idealism like her own, and expected them to be as disinterested as herself.

But her idealism was a prime factor in her undoing because of the hate and fear her neighbours bore her on account of it. However resigned and long-suffering the Russian, however docile and acquiescent the German, was there not a risk of his being infected by extreme democratic principles such as obtained in Poland? Would it not be wise to suppress a state where systematic government was unknown, and to merge its people with populations well drilled and submissive before it was too late?

We may, we think, take it as proved that, in the last analysis, the rock on which Poland shipwrecked was the intransigent love of personal liberty of her governing class, a love which was heightened by an idealism divorced from common sense. The effects produced on other peoples, or rather on their rulers, by these characteristics, and by the opportunities given them by Poland's political blindness and habitual over-self-appreciation, were disastrous for her.

Poland's whole history during this period is one long commentary on the considerations given above, a commentary which begins immediately on the death of the last Jagiello. For, with a want of political prudence and prevision which were highly characteristic, she had made no arrangements for the situation which she knew



must then arise. The problem of the succession had, indeed, been discussed at various Diets, and attempts had been made to provide an heir. Sigismund II had been pressed to obtain a divorce from his second wife, who was a hopeless invalid; but\* he was too good a Catholic to follow the example of Henry VIII. Offers had been made to legitimatise beforehand any child he might have by either of his mistresses. But the old king died heirless, and the government was at once plunged into a confusion and perplexity which were rendered dangerous by the action of the Interrex, the Archbishop of Gneszno. For the Primate imprudently invited the Senators and magnates only to a conference. The Grand Marshal promptly countered by inviting the gentry to another, and it was with difficulty that a civil war was avoided and a joint assembly convened.

This "Diet of Election"<sup>1</sup> met at Warsaw in 1573, and had five candidates for the throne presented for its acceptance. Each section of the nation seemed to unite on one or other of these: Lithuania favoured the Tsar, the higher noblesse the Austrian Archduke Ernest, the gentry Henry of Valois, heir to the kingdom of France. The suit of the last was preferred by the very able and eloquent French ambassador Montluc: his arguments, golden and other, were so persuasive that his master was elected—but on conditions!

That a bargain should be made with a Polish king was, as we have seen, no new thing, but it now became a permanent part of the constitution that the king-elect should be required to limit his prerogative in this way. Each new sovereign was bound by stricter *pacta conventa* than his predecessor, though the first presented to Henry of Valois were at the time intended to regulate the future relations between the king and his people.

However the heir<sup>2</sup> to the despotic throne of Valois

<sup>1</sup> The Diet of Election consisted not of deputies, but of all the members of the Equestrian Order who chose to attend it. The dependencies of Courland, Prussia and Pomerania, however, were not allowed to send even deputies.

<sup>2</sup> Henry, Duke of Anjou, was brother to Charles IX, the childless king of France. The Polish deputation who went to Paris to offer him the

might regard the *pacta conventa* which Montluc signed on his behalf, we cannot but consider them as on the whole reasonable. They were doubtless far in advance of even the most enlightened opinion generally held in those days: probably they helped to mould it. The chief of them were:—

1. The king should leave the free choice of his successor to the Polish nobles.
2. He should not assume the titles of "Master," or "heir" to the throne.
3. He should not declare or levy war without the Diet's consent.
4. He should impose no contribution or taxes except through the Diet; nor should he appoint ambassadors.
5. In case of internal differences of policy, he should support the party whose views were most in accord with the laws and good of the nation.
6. The sixteen members of his Council should be elected by the ordinary Diets, and should serve in rotas of four for six months.
7. A general Diet should be convoked every two years, and should not sit longer than six weeks.
8. No dignities or benefices should be given to foreigners.
9. The king should neither marry nor divorce a wife without the permission of the Diet.
10. Finally, he must keep this covenant in the spirit as well as the letter, or lose his throne!

In addition to this agreement the Diet provided a second set of stipulations, usually known as the Henrician Articles, which were intended for application to this king in particular. They were of a different kind from the first, and Henry needed much persuasion before he would accept them, even in part. It was demanded of him, among other things, that he should maintain a fleet in the Baltic for Poland and educate abroad one hundred young Poles at his own expense; that he should place a large sum of money<sup>1</sup> to the credit of the Republic, throne, wore long robes and fur caps on their shaven heads, with quivers of arrows at their backs. The scabbards of their swords, as well as the harness and trappings of their horses, glittered with jewels. They spoke fluently Latin, French, German and Italian, and in every way surprised the French Court.

<sup>1</sup> How the elected Polish kings were supposed to maintain themselves is not clear, for they had naturally no property in Poland, and there was no proper "civil list" until after 1772.

and confirm the Compact of Warsaw which guaranteed absolute equality and freedom to all religions. These conditions Henry accepted, though they must have been sufficiently distasteful, but two others he absolutely rejected. They were that he should marry the Princess Anna, the sister of Sigismund II, who was eighteen years his senior, and that he must use his influence to obtain toleration for the French Huguenots—Henry, a son of Catherine de Medici! We cannot wonder that the news of his brother's death and his own accession to the French throne, which came to Henry within a few months of his arrival in Poland, was a godsend to him, or that he fled precipitately from a kingdom where it seemed that a king had no rights, but only duties and obligations.

On Henry's departure there ensued a lengthy interregnum during which a terrible catastrophe befell Poland, probably directly occasioned by its anarchical condition. A huge Tartar horde swept over and devastated the country while its guardians the Palatines were leaderless and at variance. In addition to the loot the Tartars secured and the property they destroyed, they are said to have carried away into slavery no fewer than fifty thousand Polish captives. This fearful lesson taught the Poles that they must hasten to set their house in order, and an assembly met to elect a king. A proclamation issued by the Senate showed that it appreciated the dangers inherent in the situation, for it sought, but vainly, to restrict the retinues and the arms of the electors. All came as if summoned to defend the realm from a foreign foe. Two kings were elected, Maximilian of Austria by the Senate, and Stephen Bathory of Transylvania by the gentry. Each received from his supporters an invitation to come at once to Poland, but the Emperor received also a warning that he must on no account do so. Fortunately perhaps, Maximilian died while he was preparing to invade Poland, and in May, 1576, nearly two years after Henry's flight, Stephen, who had accepted without demur all the conditions proposed to him, was crowned

at Cracow with the Princess Anna, whom he had made his wife, and who linked him with the late Polish dynasty. Even then his troubles were not ended, for he had still to reduce the free state and city of Dantzic to obedience by a six months' siege.

Stephen was one of the world's great captains and won many battles as King of Poland, though, it must be confessed, chiefly by means of troops from his own Principality. He is always considered one of Poland's greatest sovereigns, but it may be doubted whether his election was altogether a wise one for her. It led to complications with the Austrians and the Turks. It made Moldavia and Wallachia her dependencies, and entailed corresponding responsibilities to them. Stephen's policy was, broadly stated, by means of a united Poland and Hungary to annex Muscovy, then cowering under the savage rule of Ivan the Terrible, and to drive the Turks from Europe. But it was too grandiose for Poland. She had no territorial ambition and was not in the least grateful for the renown Stephen's feats of arms brought her. It must always be doubtful whether even his genius, which shone alike in the fields of war and of diplomacy, could have brought such schemes to fruition, for they were cut short by his sudden death after a reign of only ten years. Stephen was cultured and scholarly, and his installation of the Jesuits at Cracow, Posen, Riga and other places was at the time an important educational advance, though ultimately theirs proved to be a deadening influence. It was this king who founded the University at Wilno, and who refused to persecute Dissidents, saying: "I reign over persons, but it is God who rules the conscience."

The disorderly scenes at the Diet held to elect a successor to Stephen were, if possible, more tumultuous and more confused than ever: Poland's jealous sons, fiery, undisciplined and savagely independent, there held high carnival. Again two candidates were elected—Sigismund III, a Vasa of Sweden whose mother was a Jagellon, and the Archduke Maximilian who twice in-



vaded Poland in support of his claim, and was aided by a force of malcontent Poles.

The ideal which underlay these elections was doubtless the choice out of all Europe's princes of the most suitable ruler for Poland—an ideal as high as that of the *Liberum Veto* itself—but they had already become in practice nothing more than a scramble among the different Powers for the control of the Polish army, still one of the most formidable in Europe. At each election a French, Austrian, Swedish and Prussian party was formed—Russia does not yet come into the picture—headed by the ambassador of the Power in question. And the Polish nobles, become accustomed to look upon an election as a matter of party or of personal preference, were not too high-minded to accept bribes. As soon as such a system was established the partition of Poland had begun. Her territory might still be inviolate, but her people's hearts were distributed, their votes at the service of foreigners. Each election in turn was determined more according to the interests of other Powers, less according to those of Poland herself.

But the aristocracy were still minded to keep their sovereign, once elected, firmly in leash. An instance of this occurred when Sigismund III violated the *pacta conventa* by marrying without the permission of the Diet the daughter of his former rival Maximilian of Austria, who had renounced his claim to the Polish throne, and by persecuting the Dissidents. A special Diet was convoked to inquire into his conduct, and the primate addressed the king in the frankest terms, telling him that the Poles knew how to deal with a king who did not keep his word; that "a little Swedish king" should consider himself honoured by reigning over "a free people; over nobles who have no equals under heaven." And this to a prince whose hauteur and aloofness were those of a Spanish grandee, but who, nevertheless, had to promise not to repeat such offences!

The more reasonable of the Poles agreed with Sigismund that a reform of the constitution was necessary, and in



1606 the king proposed to a Diet specially convoked for the purpose that, as unanimity was obviously an impossible ideal, decision should be by a majority of votes. Instantly a "Confederation" was formed to protest against a change "so destructive of personal liberty." It presently began to clamour for the deposition of the daring king, and announced that a Rokosz, or Insurrection, was superior to both king and Diet, as a General Council was superior to Pope and Curia. The Diet, composed of the same elements as the remonstrants, was inclined to side with them, and the affair finished with an amnesty which settled nothing, but left the gentry (with whom the king from that time ceased to strive) practically masters of the situation. They had already crushed the peasantry under their feet and reduced the burgesses to impotence. Their one rival was the power of the crown exercised through its instruments the Senate, the Chancellors and Hetmans, and their one object was to thwart every project which might enhance its power or give it prestige or popularity. They favoured a policy of isolation for Poland: she must not be entangled in foreign wars or foreign alliances, lest they should redound to the credit of the king. The army was neglected, was reduced to mutiny for its pay, dwindled to nothing; the generals were helpless in face of the enemy; the very lands of the Republic were undefended: no matter, if the country squires who monopolised power at Warsaw were thereby confirmed in their precious privileges! In the next reign the gentry were, by means of the *pacta conventa*, exempted from the only taxes to which they remained liable because "the said taxes savoured of servitude," and in the following one the splendid opportunities conferred by the Liberrum Veto dawned on the Polish Sejmiki.

This fantastic privilege was first used in 1652 to quash a war with Sweden<sup>1</sup> by forbidding the preparations for

<sup>1</sup> The Vasa-Jagellon kings of Poland at the death of each Swedish king asserted their claim to the throne of that country. They represented the elder branch of the family, but Sigismund III had been deposed and his uncle chosen in his stead.

it to go forward. It gave the power to any individual deputy, following precise instructions from his Sejmik, to hold up legislation and to paralyse the machinery of state. Occasionally the deputy was instructed to consent to no other proposals if his own were not accepted, or even if his were not considered first! A Diet might thus be dissolved before its deliberations had really begun, and as no other could constitutionally be convoked for two years, things came to a standstill. Foreign enemies could not be dealt with; they might overrun whole provinces which could receive no aid, for only the Diet could make war or peace; the army could not be paid, for, by an arrangement somewhat similar to our own, a new army bill had to be passed by each Diet. As was very truly said by Count von Moltke, after an "exploded" Diet "Poland ceased for the next two years to exist as a state."

The right of veto was held sacrosanct by the nation at large. Whether he exercised it or not "every Pole walked the earth a conscious incarnation" of its power, the power of reducing the legislative assembly to impotence by his own single obstinacy. Yet it is a curious and contradictory fact that the deputy who had the hardihood to exercise it was not accounted a hero. Rather he became most unpopular, and had to secure his safety by previous preparation for instant flight, or for protection by a powerful patron. For patriotic Poles recognised that a governmental principle which allowed a single deputy on his sole initiative to wreck a Diet was a national misfortune. John Casimir laboured to bring about the reform of this abuse, which he knew to be a matter of much urgency. In 1658-60 the Diet debated upon it, and a commission reported in favour of the limitation of the right of veto. But this introduced into Polish politics a new and fatal factor, namely, the intervention of foreign Powers for their own ends not only in elections, but in questions of internal policy. By the Austrian minister's intrigues this matter was postponed to another Diet, with the consequence that it was shelved. Poland's

neighbours from this time made it their avowed practice to prevent the adoption of any reform which might be proposed, in order that she might the more easily fall into their power.

Shortly afterwards John Casimir abdicated, and in a curious valedictory address to the Diet laid the responsibility for the lawlessness of the realm on the right shoulders. Carlyle's paraphrase of it runs thus: "Magnanimous Polish gentlemen, you are a glorious republic and have . . . strange methods of business and behaviour to your kings and others. . . . I, for my share, have had enough of it. I wish to say before going that according to all record, ancient or modern, there was not heretofore, nor do I expect there can henceforth be, a human society that would stick together on these terms. Believe me, ye Polish chevaliers, without superior except in heaven . . . the day will arrive, the day is perhaps not far off, when this glorious republic will get torn into shreds, hither, thither; be stuffed into the pockets of covetous neighbours, Brandenburg, Muscovy, Austria, and find itself reduced to zero and abolished from the face of the world. I speak these words from the fullness of my heart, and on behest of friendship and conviction alone, having the honour at this moment to bid you and your republic a very long farewell." So was John Casimir, like another Saul, among the prophets!

But all warnings were unheeded by the Polish magnates, equally famous for their valour, their arrogant individualism and their "more than regal" magnificence. In their view the Polish constitution, at the same time monarchical, aristocratic and democratic, was a perfect example of a governing machine. The saner heads among them, who admitted that improvement was not only possible but necessary, found themselves up against the invincible conservatism of the rest, and every obstacle was thrown in their way by the diplomatists of foreign Powers.

John Casimir was the last member of the Vasa-Jagiello family, and a "free" election took place on his

departure, foreign gold being, as usual, lavishly employed to further the causes of foreign candidates. On this occasion, however, the lesser gentry were suspicious of foreign influence, and perhaps did not share in the foreign gold: anyhow, a native Pole, Michael Wisniowiecki—who had nothing to recommend him except his nationality and who tearfully shunned the dangerous honour—was elected, and after him another Pole, John III (Sobieski). He had been far from a loyal or obedient subject to the late king, but his victories over the Turks, when he opposed them in person, had glorified Poland in the eyes of all men, and he was chosen by acclamation when he appeared in the election field. Yet in his reign Bain<sup>1</sup> says that the *Liberum Veto* “sank so low that its principal use was to shelter high-placed felons from the pursuit of justice.” If the Diet determined to call in question the doings of a traitorous Grand Hetman of Lithuania, or the king desired to settle the succession, instruments were always ready at the behest of factious persons or parties to “explode” it, and prevent anything being accomplished. John III suffered in his later years for his careless gratification of personal feelings against his predecessor, King Michael. Disillusioned and broken-hearted, he also predicted “irreparable ruin and damnation” for the ungrateful country he had failed to bridle, which had not even known how to profit from the victories which his military genius had snatched from seemingly overwhelming odds.

His successor was Augustus II, Elector of Saxony, one of eighteen candidates, two of whom were elected. He only secured the throne at the expense of two years of civil war, for the nation at large favoured his rival. This was the first election in which Russia intervened, Peter the Great's purpose being a negative one, to prevent the election of a candidate favoured by France, and therefore by her friends Sweden and Turkey, who were his enemies. Augustus II had only an evil influence: the more the Poles knew of him, the less, it has been

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge Modern History.*



said, they loved him. He entirely alienated the Lithuanians, who worshipped the rising star of Sweden. Her king, the famous Charles XII, overran Poland, and placed his friend, Stanislaw Leszczyński, Palatine of Posen, on the throne, so that for a time republican Poland had two kings!

Sweden had then become a first-rate Power, her monarchy firmly established, her military reputation second to none. Her ambition was to make the Baltic a Swedish lake, and for that end to obtain possession of the German, Polish and Lithuanian lands contiguous to it. She desired above all things a southern sea-board which would give her, as it were, the entry into Europe. Swedish influence ruled in Poland for a time, but it was annihilated with the Swedish armies on the field of Poltava. Had Charles XII been as prudent and far-seeing as he was brave, things would have fallen out very differently. As it was, his protégé Stanislaw Leszczyński was ignominiously driven out. Augustus II was restored and with him Saxon influence, which, however, Poland was still strong enough to keep in bounds. It was very different with Russia: her influence was an ever-increasing menace, and weighed more heavily with each passing year.

At the death of Augustus II France interested herself in the candidature of the ex-king Stanislaw, and sent as a first instalment four million livres to be used in his support—to buy votes for him—while Austria sent a million ducats to be used against him, for there was as yet no other candidate. Thereupon Russia, Austria and Brandenburg—ominous conjunction!—joined forces to oppose the nominee of France, and brought forward the son of the late king, Augustus, Elector of Saxony. Overwhelming Russian forces entered the country on his behalf, Polish malcontents having already appealed to the Empress Catherine for her “august protection.” Stanislaw, who found the Polish army to be but a shadow of a shade, shut himself up in Dantzic, which endured nineteen weeks’ siege before it fell to the Russian army.



He then escaped to France, where he later became Duke of Lorraine and Bar, the *philosophe bienfaisant* of pious memory.

An obedient Diet had meanwhile, under the armed surveillance of Russia, elected Augustus III, who after two and a half years of bloodshed and anarchy was recognised by all Poland as king. Things went from bad to worse during his reign, for he was idle, indifferent, and an absentee. He did not even attempt to protect the land he nominally governed. During the Seven Years' War, for instance, the combatants marched over neutral Poland as they listed; they fought their battles on Polish soil; they commandeered and blackmailed at their pleasure without a word or a thought of compensation. Poland was, in Carlyle's pungent language, "lying as if broken-backed on the public highway; a nation anarchic every fibre of it, and under the feet and hoofs of travelling neighbours."

Internal administration was in no better case, for Augustus's ministers exercised no power in Poland. The Diet was regularly exploded. Each one of fifteen Diets which met alternately in Poland and Lithuania every two years, as was the constitutional practice, was thus dissolved without having a single enactment to its credit. Every gentleman was a law unto himself. The magnates,<sup>1</sup> who were often enormously wealthy and correspondingly independent, maintained little courts which were centres of art and music, of elegance and luxury, of generous and graceful living. In them the sons of the gentry served as squires and were brought up in the traditions of liberty as understood by their fathers and patrons. To the casual eye all looked well, but this outer show of affluence and culture shrouded—not too successfully—the utter poverty and degradation which prevailed among the

<sup>1</sup> The Palatine Stanislaw Jablonowski had a retinue of 2,300 soldiers and 4,000 courtiers, valets, armed attendants, jesters, musicians and actors. Janusz, Prince of Ostrog, owned 80 towns and 2,760 villages, without reckoning those granted by him for life to others. Prince Czartoryski had a yearly revenue of £100,000—an immense income in those days—and lived up to it.

people. The soil, cultivated by inefficient and uneconomic serf-labour, was neglected and unproductive. Industry and commerce languished in the hands of Jews and foreigners. The nobles, who alone had capital, took no part in such matters, and the disfranchised and degraded descendants of the older race of enterprising burghers had neither spirit nor money wherewith to engage in or extend business. Poverty and squalor were only too general. Bread, Carlyle says, was as unknown in many villages as forks and spoons. Spinning-wheels and looms were rare, and furniture was conspicuous by its absence in most peasant homes. Only the crucifix and basin of holy water assured one that the inhabitants of such hovels could be human beings.

There ceased also to be a regular army in Poland, because the gentry would neither serve in it nor pay for a mercenary force. In this connection King Stanislaw uttered yet another solemn warning. "I reflect with much dread upon the perils which surround us," he said. "What forces have we to resist our neighbours? . . . We imagine that our neighbours are interested in our preservation by their mutual jealousies, a vain prejudice which . . . will surely deprive us of our liberty if, depending on such a frivolous hope, we continue unarmed. Our turn will come, no doubt . . . perhaps the neighbouring Powers will combine to divide our state."

Nor was there a diplomatic service. The all-powerful Polish squire was too provincial to see the use of having representatives to keep him in touch with the policies of foreign countries, though he was too ready to appeal to them to support him in some confederation against a section of his own people. Even the great Lithuanian family of the Czartoryskis, though they were ardent patriots who desired nothing so much as a reform of the constitution and laboured patiently through many years for it, were short-sighted enough to imagine that it could be obtained by Russian help, and appealed to Catherine to send an army to dethrone Augustus III. At the time

she declined to do so, but when he died fifteen thousand Russian troops presided over the election which made Stanislaw Poniatowski king of Poland.

From that time Poland was more or less in Russia's pocket, garrisoned by Russian troops, her king, "the most suitable for our purposes," as was agreed by Frederick the Great, elected without any serious opposition from the other European Powers. Catherine had no thought then of partitioning Poland. What she desired was to secure there the preponderating influence of Russia, and to keep Poland intact with the shadow of independence as a buffer state against Austria and Prussia. She had no intention, either, of allowing the constitution to be reformed, though the new king and his Polish friends<sup>1</sup> represented to her that it was absolutely necessary. By way of keeping open Russia's right of entry into Poland, Catherine took up the cause of the Orthodox Dissidents,<sup>2</sup> for whom she demanded not merely toleration, which the nobles were willing to grant, but equality with the national Church, which the Diet of 1756 had explicitly denied them by excluding all except Catholics from Government posts. This equality the tumultuous Diet of 1766 not only refused to grant, but it repealed all Czartoryski's reforms enacted by its predecessor. The Polish leaders were promptly arrested by orders of the Russian ambassador because, as he said, they had "compromised the dignity of H.I.M. the Empress Catherine by having attacked the purity of her salutary and disinterested intent towards the Republic." Russian troops were next quartered on all those who stood out against Russia's policy, and Polish malcontents—not Dissidents as such, but enemies of Stanislaw and the reforming party in Poland—were formed by Russian intrigue into the confederation of Radom, which immediately appealed to the Empress

<sup>1</sup> His mother was a Czartoryska.

<sup>2</sup> Prussia took up that of the Protestant Dissidents, and they formed a confederation at Thorn.

to intervene on behalf of their policy. This she was more than ready to do, as their policy, preservation of the *Liberum Veto* and support of the Dissidents, was hers also. The Diet was brought to heel by the arrest and deportation to Russia of many of its leaders and prominent members, whereupon it passed laws which ratified the Russian programme. All the worst parts of the Polish constitution were confirmed, and under these conditions Russia guaranteed the integrity of Poland and promised her protection. Thenceforth any attempted opposition or reform would necessarily mean the intervention of Russia on behalf of her treaty rights.

Nevertheless a confederation was formed at Bar (1768) to protest against the decisions of the last Diet. Though little formidable at first, this confederation represented a real national feeling, and when bloodily repressed<sup>1</sup> in one place appeared in another, and finally involved Russia in an inconvenient war with Turkey. Catherine, no longer able easily to dominate Poland, began to lend an ear to projects of partition which were presented to her, not for the first time, by the Prussian ambassador. Thus was the stage set and the way prepared for the Partition of Poland. She had long lain, an inert, defenceless, chaotic mass, between living, organised and powerful states which took every care that she should have no chance to pull herself together by means of constitutional reform. Their eventual fate had been clear for a hundred years or more to all except the Poles themselves, and they were wilfully blind and deaf to all the warnings of their most experienced statesmen.

We may perhaps profitably summarise the successive steps that brought Poland to a pass of anarchy where government may be said to have ceased, where reform was rendered impossible, and where foreign intervention

<sup>1</sup> Mickiewicz speaks in his *Book of the Polish Pilgrimage* of "twenty thousand knights of Bar" slain by the Russians. The confederates maintained guerilla warfare all over the country in village, marsh and forest against the foreign foe whose soldiers garrisoned every town and fortress in the land.



was a recognised and habitual means of regulating the affairs of the state.

Casimir III admitted representatives of the people, not merely nominees of the crown, into the Diet, which put the gentry on the lowest rung of the ladder of government. The dynasty of the Piasts being presently without an heir male, the first Jagiello became king, and from that time the crown became in reality elective, though for two hundred years confined to members of the same family. These kings—all Polish kings in fact—were constantly forced to make good the territory of the republic against jealous and greedy neighbours who surrounded it on all sides, and military service was a heavy burden on the “legal” Poles, on whom alone it rested. It became a habit with the Diets only to grant troops or supplies, not, as in England, on the redress of grievances, but on the yielding on the part of the king of portions of the royal prerogative, or the obtaining of privileges by the nobility at the expense of the lower orders or of the crown.

The nobility was very numerous in Poland. It is supposed that at this period it consisted of a maximum of from 120,000 to 160,000 adult males, most of whom, of course, were the Szlachta, or smaller gentry, the Pans, or noble lords, being in a small minority. The latter were usually educated and patriotic, and had a sufficiently wide outlook to understand what measures would be beneficial: the former were not statesmanlike in outlook or policy and were bent on obtaining power and privileges for their own order, and on correspondingly depressing the power and hampering the initiative of the king, whom they elected but prevented from governing. This went on with ever-increasing momentum when, male Jagiellos having failed, the crown became elective in theory as well as in practice. Then every new king had to sign new *pacta conventa* which made fresh inroads on the prerogative and laid fresh burdens on the king.<sup>1</sup> “Free” elections degenerated almost into free fights. Foreign ambassadors poured out money in support of their

<sup>1</sup> Money payments, the maintenance of a Baltic Fleet, etc.



candidates—cynics hinted that Poland lived by the sale of her crown! Hardly any candidate was elected who did not afterwards have to fight for possession of his kingdom, and each sovereign found it progressively more difficult to carry out his functions, whether of administration or of defence.

Following on the introduction of elective sovereignty a great change was gradually worked in the national character, at least in the case of the governing class, and that a change for the worse. The former simplicity, frugality and patriotism of the noblesse gave place to pride, luxury and selfishness, while the lower orders were ground down into a condition of poverty and abject misery.

In the Diet also a destructive change made its appearance when each deputy claimed the right of using the *Liberum Veto*, and an ever-increasing number made good the claim. "*Nie pozwalam*"—I do not consent—and forthwith the Diet was paralysed: even measures already passed were nullified at the will or caprice of one man. And as if that were not enough to make government impossible, "*confederations*" were habitually formed of men who objected to measures passed by the Diets, or who sought to impose their will between Diets. Sometimes these confederations were successful; but successful or not, no man ever suffered as a traitor for obstructing the will of the people as expressed by its legislative assembly. Sometimes there were opposing confederations, and nothing was easier for any Power which desired to interfere in Polish affairs than to get one up. Even patriotic Poles acquired the habit of appealing to foreign Powers and of requesting their intervention in Poland's domestic concerns.

Those Powers saw to it that the virus of anarchy was given time and opportunity to work, and that no measures were taken to counteract it. So the time came gradually nearer when they could assert as a result of their patient husbandry: "Government here there is none. We must, in the interests of our own subjects, of law and order, step in and end a nation that is not a

nation, but a congeries of conflicting atoms, its organs atrophied, its polity masterless and moribund."

It is undeniable that Poland herself smoothed the way for the Powers which dismembered her: she gave their greed an opportunity and their treachery an excuse. She was weak, lawless, venal; the masses of her people were merely helots, uninterested in her fate, powerless to influence it; her governing classes, as a whole blindly obstructive and conservative, cared only for their own concerns. They were fatalistically willing, seemingly, to let their country perish rather than allow her by reform of recent abuses to become strong enough to resist the fate that every man, not crassly ignorant or wilfully blind, could perceive looming ever nearer. Disaster was the sure consequence of government entirely in the interests of one irresponsible class. It gave Poland a constitution "no part of which would work." It laid her open to the reproach of being both a danger and a nuisance to her more orderly neighbours, each one of whom was stronger than she was, and two of whom considered themselves legitimate claimants of certain of her lands.

## VII

### THE RELATIONS BETWEEN POLAND AND RUSSIA

THE two great branches of the Slav race stand in a somewhat different relation to one another from that which either of them holds to other races. Down to the end of the sixteenth century there was no particular hostility between them, though latterly Russia had a grievance against Poland, to whom she had indirectly lost territory, a loss which she was almost bound sooner or later to try to redress. But then occurred an episode unparalleled in Polish history, a definite predatory attack on her neighbour, which fundamentally altered the feeling of Russia. It made her hostile to Poland and strengthened her desire to recover her own lost lands. Poland's aggression in the early seventeenth century must be regarded as contributing to her subsequent ruin. Had her relations with Russia been friendly during that century and the next, Poland's decadence might have been arrested and her partition averted. We purpose, therefore, to sketch the relations of the two countries from early times, and to trace in outline the development of the Russian polity—so different from that of Poland!—as a necessary contribution to an understanding of the reasons and events which led to the Partition.

#### FIRST PHASE.

The Poland of early times lay far to the west of the debatable land on the Russian borders whose settlement presents so many serious problems to-day. In the time of King Boleslaw the Brave she belonged to Western

Europe, but she was gradually pushed eastwards by dogged German advances that deprived her of most of her western provinces. Movement to the east had, however, definite limits, for between ancient Rus and Poland a natural and almost insuperable barrier interposed in the shape of the marsh-lands of the Niemen and Pripet. They were then much more extensive than now and more completely water-logged; haunted, moreover by savage tribes that terrified the Slavs. The steppes south of these morasses were for the most part inhabited by roaming bands of raiding Tartars, who at all times rendered communications unsafe.

A cause of separation between Eastern and Western Slavs, more potent even than physical obstacles, arose in religion. While the two nations were in the making two rival forms of Christianity presented themselves. Greek Orthodox missionaries penetrated both countries by way of the trade routes debouching on the Black Sea coasts, and Catholic evangelists sailed down the Danube and up the German rivers. The two creeds were not yet officially separated, but the adoption by Russia of the Greek form and by Poland of the Latin was a fact of infinite importance.

The change from paganism was in both cases a matter of policy. The Russian prince saw in it a means of consolidating his very incoherent state, of uniting his people by a bond strong beyond all others. He knew also that in the Byzantine Empire, then almost at its zenith, was embodied a higher civilisation, a mightier power, a wealthier and more cultured state than his own, and may well have regarded the adoption of its creed as the first step to similar learning, might and majesty for Russia. In St. Sophia, the parent church of Greek Christianity, he was assured by his envoys, 'God dwells in the midst of men.' So, after a youth of devotion to the old gods and of almost unparalleled sensuality,<sup>1</sup> Vladimir became the 'apostle' of Christianity, and spread its tenets throughout his realm by example and exhortation, or, where these failed, by fire and sword.

<sup>1</sup> His concubines were nearly as numerous as those of King Solomon.



The political motives which induced Poland to abjure paganism were, as has been seen, different. She was menaced on her western border by a militant Germany before which she was beginning to give way. Poland's conversion, soon followed by her spiritual independence, secured her political independence, and was designed to do so.

Few more momentous events have occurred in all history than the baptism of Mieszko I in 965, and of Vladimir in 988 into different Churches, for they caused Poland and Russia in all time coming to tread different paths. Russia became largely Oriental in outlook, the only European Orthodox nation—in her own eyes indeed its only Christian nation—exclusive, aloof; her Emperor, as head of the Church, the representative of Heaven and the autocrat of men, his power unquestioned, his prerogative absolute. Poland, on the other hand, became Occidental in outlook, her zealous Catholic people the bulwarks and champions of Western religion against both Muscovite and Ottoman fanaticism, her constitution the freest in Europe, her people the most individual and the least impressed by kingly authority. "*Rex servus rei publicæ*" was the motto which guided her in her dealings with her sovereigns, and nothing could have been more unlike either the ideal or the reality of the Russian state.

Circumstances changed the outlook of the Russians in time; they became more Westernised, and their mantle of detachment and complacency was lowered, if not altogether dropped. But the characteristics implanted in them by centuries of religious isolation are indelibly ingrained. The sedate, deeply religious Russian, and the Pole, lively, albeit also deeply religious, are doubtless brothers, but they are brothers that have been brought up in different households and environments. They have no great love for one another, and, it must be confessed, but little cause to cherish friendly feelings.

During the early "heroic" history of both nations, however, when Boleslaw the Brave and his successors reigned in Poland, and Vladimir the Bright Sun and Yaroslav the Wise reigned in Russia, relations were fairly



intimate and friendly between the two Slav peoples. Sometimes they quarrelled: the suzerainty of Eastern Galicia and Red Russia, for instance, was a bone of contention between them; but, as it has been well put, in the main, "warlike princes attacked their neighbours (while) politic princes intermarried with them," and joined in alliances with them against common enemies, particularly against the Lithuanians and Prussians. The conquests of 'the godless Litva,' as the Russian chroniclers call the former, begun as early as 1183, in the thirteenth century drove a wedge between the two Slav peoples. This intrusion must have largely cut off intercourse for more than a century, until the Lithuano-Polish union in 1386 gave Russia and Poland again a common frontier, but in a different place from the old one. For a vital change had meantime come to Russia, whose people had lost the cradle of their race and had begun to build up a new empire far to the north, in the cold inhospitable land round the Moskva river.

The earliest Russian history is concerned with the fortunes of the Principality of Kiev, and centres on the Dnieper valley. The great rulers of Kievan 'Rus,' Vladimir and Yaroslav, extended their domains to the west also, and had a shadowy sway over Livonia and other provinces there. It is to this period, with its vivid and adventurous life, its freedom and rough zest of existence, its wealth, splendour and learning—all great for that age—that Russians fondly look back across the ages in which a ghastly monotony of misery and misfortune have been their portion. It was the lost 'patrimony of St. Vladimir' that, as Russia Irridenta, made the lure that attracted them towards Poland in later times. For the frontier of Russia in the eleventh century included much territory which afterwards accrued to the Poles through their union with Lithuania. That frontier may be roughly indicated by a line starting fifty miles east of Memel and continuing in a southerly direction till it reaches the Carpathians, where it includes at least Eastern Galicia. Such a frontier coincides more or less accurately

with that which Russia regained some seven or eight centuries later by her share of partitioned Poland, though in the south the earlier frontier was more favourable to Russia than the later one.

The circumstances by virtue of which so much territory, originally Russian, passed to Poland are in part described elsewhere, but it is necessary briefly to outline them here, more particularly as it is desirable also to view them from the Russian standpoint.

Russia was divided during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries into (eventually) some sixty-four principalities, all nominally owing allegiance to the senior prince at Kiev or elsewhere, but all usually animated by feelings of rivalry, and of determination to assert or attain their independence. Their other main preoccupation was the repulsion of Tartar raids which every year sought to lay waste the land and carry off its able-bodied inhabitants to slavery. Upon Russia thus weakened poured the devastating hordes of the Mongols to whose grinding tyranny she was exposed for more than two centuries. About the beginning of "The Mongol Terror" a new menace arose in the formidable military power of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy. The divisions of Kievan Rus gave its able princes an opportunity of which they amply availed themselves. They speedily tore province after province from the helpless Russian princes and carried their conquests to the very shores of the Black Sea, into country that had never been held by Kievan Rus. Their heterogeneous state, so rapidly and easily acquired, would doubtless soon have fallen to pieces again but for its union with Poland in 1386. By means of the "golden link of the crown" Catholic Poland shared the lands won by the swords of Gedymin and Olgerd, rulers of pagan Lithuania, and thus set up a fertile source of trouble between herself and her Slav sister, Russia.

By the middle of the fourteenth century, then, the original 'Russian Land' and its hinterland was shared by two participants, by the Mongols who held in vassalage the country watered by the Volga and the Don, and by

Poland, who, through her union with Lithuania, had possessed herself of an immense tract which extended some five hundred miles beyond her former boundaries. It embraced the country containing the head-waters of the Western Dwina and the Niemen towards the north, Lithuania proper, and the basin of the middle Dnieper towards the south, Russia proper. The latter came to be known as Little Russia or the Ukraine, and was formally made over to Poland at the Congress of Lublin by Lithuania, which state was compensated for this loss of territory by the incorporation of the newly acquired province of Livonia. That this was a partition of Russia in an hour of weakness and disunion is undeniable : but its true nature was doubtless unperceived by Poland because she only received Russian lands at second hand, as it were. In view of later happenings it is, however, proper to remember that Poland was not the first country to undergo dismemberment.

Little Russia, when it came into Polish possession, was very much an unpopulated wilderness or no-man's-land, the Ukraine, March or Border between Muscovy, Poland and the Tartars of the Crimean Khanate. Its original Russian population had emigrated in large numbers under the stress of changing economic conditions, or been driven out by the Mongols. Part went north-east towards Novgorod and Moscow, and part west into Poland. When the Poles became masters of the lands of the Dnieper basin these emigrants, or rather their descendants, returned to their native land. With them went many Polish lords, who carved out great estates for themselves in the fertile Black Lands of their new colonial empire. The nobles were, of course, Catholics, but the other immigrants were Orthodox in faith and Russian by race. The Ruthenes, or Russini, as the Poles called them, were merely workers or serfs on the great estates, and strong efforts were made from time to time to convert them to Catholicism, but with the scantest success. Political considerations had more to do with the proselytising zeal of the Polish land-owners than religious ardour. Their activities for long ran

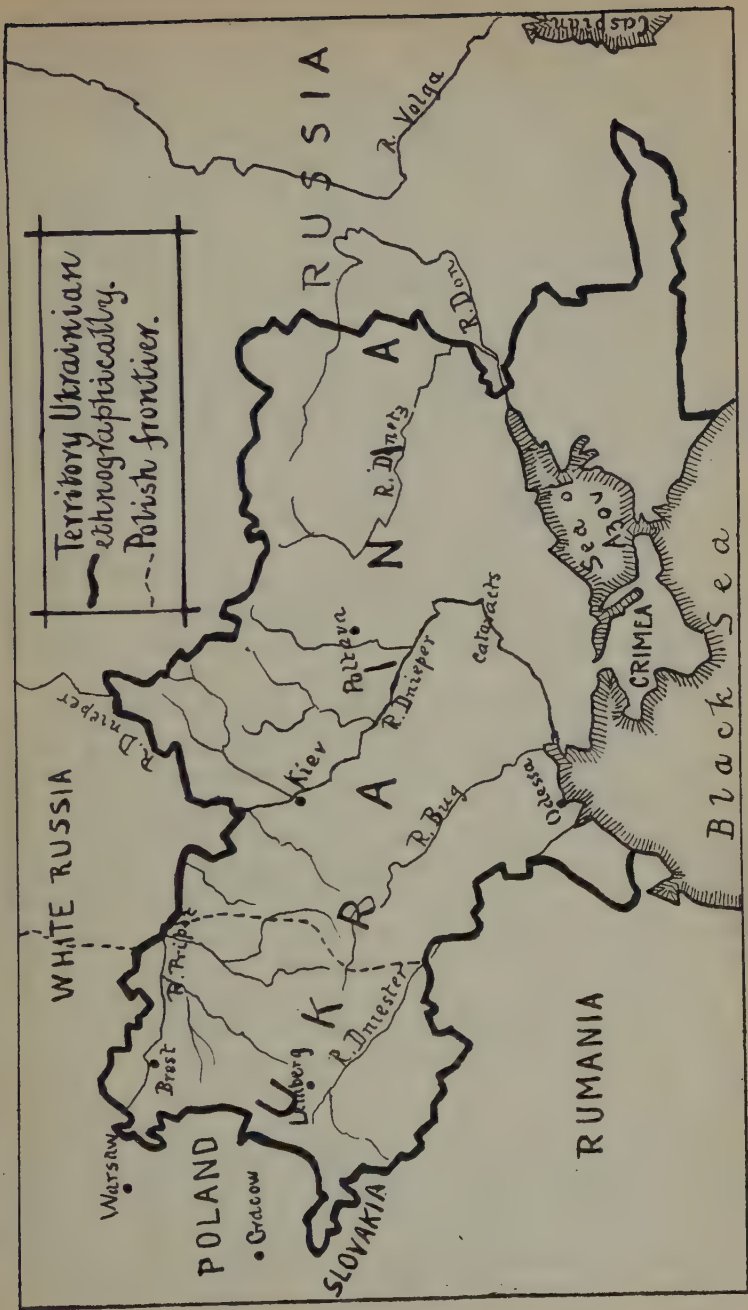
counter to the feelings and legislation of Poland herself, and had very terrible consequences later, as we shall see.

The peasantry clung obstinately to their faith, and in 1595 a compromise was effected by the Union of Brest. It was extensively adopted in the more western districts contiguous with Poland: the more easterly ones in contact with Muscovy would have none of it. By the provisions of this Union Papal supremacy was recognised instead of that of the Moscow Metropolitan, but the religious ceremonial and the language of the services were not altered. Thus arose the so-called Uniat Church. By its means many of the Ruthenes were, indeed, separated from the Orthodox Slavs of Muscovy, but they were not absorbed into the Polish Church and nation, and the religious problem was merely complicated by the addition of a third element. Muscovy regarded these Uniats as backsliders to be restored to the fold by any and every means. Poland regarded them as representatives of her cultural, religious, and, she hoped, political, predominance in the regions on the Muscovite border. It is obvious, at all events, that they provided the elements of future quarrels rather than of peace and settlement.

During the lengthened period of their separation from the Muscovite Slavs, their blood brothers, the Ruthenes had come somewhat to differ from them. They had to a certain extent absorbed Polish culture and ideas, and on their return to the Ukraine they intermarried in some cases with the Tartars whom they found there. Their speech has been wittily described as "*Langue Russe, à la Polonaise, sauce Tartare*," but it was *Langue Russe*. As they had gained something of Polish individuality and independence, the Muscovite village communal system never appealed to them.

Those men of old Rus who migrated northwards, on the other hand, had come into contact with and absorbed the Finnish inhabitants of the land. Their speech shows traces of this admixture, and their religion. They seem to have adopted the pantheon of nature gods of the Finns, whom they regarded as potent magicians, and to have







peopled hell with them ! A superstitious belief in spirits of woodland and marsh, of tree and river, often wicked or terrifying, even now forms a peculiar part of the spiritual furniture of the mind of the Great Russian, who is a very primitive person. His migrations had taken him into a colder climate and a sterner, less productive land than Kievan Rus, and his mentality<sup>1</sup> was coloured by his new surroundings. He became wary and indirect in his methods. Caution, patience and opportunism he learnt by passing long hours monotonously unemployed, and by working feverishly while the sun shone. But the differences are not in essentials. Both the Great Russians and the Little Russians are Orthodox Slavs, and never until, politically speaking, yesterday<sup>2</sup> entertained any idea but that they were one people.

We must now ask how Muscovy—the state of the Great Russians, the child of Kievan Rus and the parent of modern Russia—arose, before we further study its relations with Poland.

The expression Kievan Rus represented a principality whose sovereigns were heads of a loose confederation merely, and in process of time the supremacy passed from Kiev, which fell into Tartar hands. The eclipse and ruin of ancient Rus were complete : not only did its rich and fertile territory go, but also its economic system and social fabric. There remained the potent bonds of language, race, religion, common interests, common enemies, and above all, of a single ruling house in the descendants of Rurik. There was still a Grand Prince to whom the junior princes owed homage and obedience, and after several changes his seat came to be fixed at Moscow. This city only dates from the latter half of

<sup>1</sup> Based on Kluchevsky's *History of Russia*.

<sup>2</sup> The Ukrainophil movement first became really articulate about the middle of last century, but thirty or forty years passed before it grew into a serious political factor. There are some thirty million Ruthenes, a compact ethnic body extending across Southern Russia almost to the Caspian, and including the Crimea. This territory is claimed by the Ukrainians as heirs of the Principality of Kiev and of the Cossack Republics.

the twelfth century, and was for long inconsiderable and obscure among Russian cities. But it was fortunate in its situation between the great rivers Volga and Oka, and in its line of princes. By a patient, prudent and far-seeing policy, by means of subservience to their Mongol overlords, and by alternate cunning and force practised upon their brother princes, they made their principality the focus of a new Russia. One by one they 'gathered in' to Muscovy the neighbouring cities and states, and when in 1481 the last Khan of the Golden Horde perished in battle, they threw off the Mongol yoke. Ivan III had already, by marriage with the last scion of the Imperial Greek dynasty of Byzantium, acquired the prestige conferred by the headship of the Greek or Orthodox Church. He and his descendants fell heirs also to the political autocracy of the Greek Emperors, which, reinforced by the spectacle of the absolutism of the Mongol Khans so long the masters of Russia, led these princes to assume unlimited power as their right. This claim the influence of the Church and the grateful sentiments of the people, delivered from a detested foreign tyranny, fully confirmed. A stable and powerful sovereignty once enthroned at Moscow, its princes, become autocrats, Tsars, proceeded to carry out the natural aspirations of the nation and to redeem Russia Irredenta, for centuries in the grasp of Lithuanians, Poles and Tartars. Under Ivan IV the whole course of the Volga was won, that of the Don a century later. A beginning was also made with the redemption of Russian land in Polish hands, but the work was interrupted when the line of the strong Muscovite princes, the first Tsars, came to an end (1598).

#### SECOND PHASE.

Already the neighbouring potentates feared the new Muscovite state, and used all means in their power to prevent it making cultural and economic advances, and from reaching the Baltic where it would come into contact with the higher civilisation of Western Europe. Ivan IV well knew the need of a more convenient port than

Archangel, and spent twenty years in the unsuccessful attempt to acquire one. He sent emissaries also to Germany to engage skilled workmen, doctors, gunners and scientific engineers. But to reach Muscovy they had to pass through Poland, and permission to do so was jealously refused.<sup>1</sup> Sigismund II on one occasion threatened with death English sailors who attempted to carry on a forbidden traffic in firearms, on the ground that 'the Muscovite, who is not only our opponent to-day, but the general enemy of all free nations, should not be allowed to supply himself with . . . munitions, or with artisans who manufacture arms hitherto unknown to these barbarians.' Muscovy's neighbour well knew that her rise meant its decline, and, as we shall see, Sweden came to share Poland's views on that subject.

When the Muscovite dynasty flickered out in the feeble person of Theodore I, a disorderly interregnum ensued during which usurpers filled the throne. The Polish king at that crisis was Sigismund III, the "Catholic zealot" who filled Poland with the noise and fury of religious persecution, there specially directed against the Protestants among his subjects. Sigismund saw that the people of Muscovy were ripe for revolt against their upstart Tsar, Boris Godunov. He saw also an opportunity of pressing Catholicism upon a distracted and divided people, and possibly further, if all went well, of rendering Poland for ever safe against her formidable rival—visions which far exceeded his power of accomplishment, especially as that must depend in large measure on the goodwill of the Poles, who could never be driven and who abhorred foreign adventures. At that time, however, the international situation was eminently favourable for an enterprise on the part of Poland against Muscovy. Western Europe was completely engrossed with the War of the Spanish Succession and the Thirty Years' War; the Porte was for the time quiescent; Sweden, though bitterly hostile to Sigismund for dynastic reasons, did not yet count seriously in high politics; the Polish king's Catholic

<sup>1</sup> They, however, reached Muscovy by way of Sweden.

zeal also won him the favour of the Church. It was no marvel that Sigismund seized the occasion which so opportunely presented itself of adding a new realm to Latin Christendom, of gaining fresh apostolic renown for himself, and of making the Polish crown at the very least Suzerain of the Tsardom, with further alluring prospects beyond.

A pretender to the throne of Muscovy appeared in Poland at this crucial moment. He claimed to be the younger son of Ivan IV who had escaped murder at the hands of the usurper Boris. He received Sigismund's moral support and permission to recruit forces in Poland, in return for binding promises to introduce Catholicism into Muscovy.

The advent of the Russian Perkin Warbeck was hailed with joy at Moscow, but, though exceptionally able, intelligent and energetic—or perhaps because of these qualities—Demetrius soon alienated his new subjects. They disliked his offhand un-Russian ways, his religion, his wife and his entourage, which were all Polish. During the anarchy which followed his murder Sigismund III entered Muscovy with an army “which lived at free quarters, ravaged, burnt and robbed like a second horde of Tartars,”<sup>1</sup> in order, as he avowed, to seat himself upon its throne. His son Wladislaw was actually titular Tsar from 1610 till 1613, and Tsar Vasili Shuiski was carried off to grace, in chains, the triumphal entry into Warsaw of the Polish Commander-in-Chief.

After a long siege Sigismund took the strong fortress of Smolensk, which, with its three hundred towers, dominated the Dnieper valley. Its loss threatened Muscovy with extinction, and in their extremity the Boyars invited the Swedes to aid them against the Poles. The Swedish regent<sup>2</sup> accepted the invitation, but advanced no farther than

<sup>1</sup> This description applies to their Cossack allies, not to the Poles themselves, who, Bain says, “were merciful to their captives, exacted moderate ransoms, and regarded with wonder and horror the unspeakable cruelties” of the Cossacks.

<sup>2</sup> Sigismund had been king of Sweden, but as a zealous Catholic he was quite unacceptable to Lutheran Sweden. His subjects deposed him, and there was bitter enmity between the two countries.



Novgorod, which he annexed without a single shred of justification or of provocation, and added to it other Russian lands contiguous to the Baltic shores. Far from lending aid to their distressed hosts, having securely established themselves between Muscovy and the sea, the Swedes sat still and merely watched the doings of the Poles. In 1612 they even entered into negotiations with the Russian leader Prince Pozharsky (who wished to gain time) with a view to securing the throne of Muscovy for a Swedish prince, Charles Philip, a cousin of Sigismund.

Presently the Muscovites were goaded beyond endurance, and the national spirit flamed up irresistibly. Inspired by the appeals of the saintly Dionysius of the famous Troitsa Monastery, to 'lay aside dissensions for a time, and strive, all together, to save the Christian faith (from) the eternal enemies of Christianity, the Poles and the Lithuanians,' they managed to expel the Poles from Moscow. Then (1613) a national and representative assembly elected Michael, the first of the Romanovs, to be Tsar. His election satisfied national and patriotic feeling because he was through his mother descended from Rurik, and was related to the last legitimate Tsar.

It would be impossible to imagine<sup>1</sup> any country in a worse plight than Muscovy at Michael's accession. Financially ruined, pillaged from end to end by marauding gangs, with broken and bankrupt fugitives wandering forlorn on every highway and dying in every snow-drift, its Baltic provinces and its ancient city of Great Novgorod occupied by the Swedes, its western provinces commanded by the Poles at Smolensk, an independent Cossack kingdom set up over the lower Volga with Astrakan as its capital, its ancient loyalty and faith in its Tsars rudely shaken, Muscovy seemed indeed to be on the point of dissolution. Happily the young Tsar found capable counsellors, and, with the aid of representative assemblies, the mighty task of pacification and reconstruc-

<sup>1</sup> Recent realities in Russia, especially during the famine of 1921-2, not only transcended the wretchedness of "The Time of Troubles," but absolutely beggared all imagination.



tion was resolutely prosecuted, and progressed with a fair measure of success. The foreign foes also were dealt with. After prolonged negotiations a peace was concluded with Sweden in 1617 by which Great Novgorod was returned to Muscovy and Michael was recognised as Tsar in return for the surrender of 'a few places.' Some of them were, however, of vital importance, for their surrender established Sweden on the eastern shores of the Baltic. But in the circumstances, and for the moment, Muscovy was satisfied with the bargain.

Open warfare still continued with the Poles, who refused to recognise Michael or give up any of their gains. So chagrined were the Polish lords when their troops were turned out of Moscow, that they insisted that Sigismund must 'at once proceed to Moscow' to retrieve the situation; but no whisper was heard from them of the means wherewith to do it. They blamed the king, not unjustly, for this humiliation. They called him 'careless,' 'sluggish,' 'incompetent,' and helped him not at all. After great difficulty, and only by arranging to pay them himself, Sigismund engaged three thousand German mercenaries with whom to reconquer Muscovy! After he had set out, a few Poles and Cossacks joined his tiny force, which even then had not the smallest chance of success. Another effort, however, was made. In 1617, Wladislaw, the so-called Polish Tsar, set out with an army and supplies, granted for one year only by the reluctant Diet, 'to conquer and incorporate Muscovy.' Joined by the Polish registered Cossacks, he advanced to Moscow, where his army was repulsed and lost heavily. His troops were ill-clothed and ill-fed, their pay in arrears. So untrustworthy did they become that Wladislaw was obliged to enter into negotiations with the enemy. The Truce of Deulino was concluded in 1618. By it the Poles withdrew Wladislaw's claim to the Muscovite throne and recognised Michael as Tsar. They were amply compensated for the relinquishment of a title to which they had no right and which they had never made good. For Michael was obliged to surrender to them a considerable tract of

territory, including the strong and important towns of Smolensk, Novgorod-Seversk and Tchernigov. These acquisitions brought the Polish frontier to its farthest extension in an easterly direction,<sup>1</sup> and marked high-water in the outward fortunes of the Republic.

Poland was now, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, at the zenith of her power, among the greatest of European nations, completely at one with her sister-state Lithuania, her throne the object of eager competition between kings and potentates, her position in the Catholic world only rivalled by that of Spain, her superiority over the Muscovite Slav indisputable. Her strength was, however, more apparent than real. Germs of trouble lay thickly on her own soil, but they might not by themselves have proved her undoing had there been no fatal embroglio with Russia. But it was just here, in this sphere of foreign policy, that her chief danger lurked, as was amply proved by the march of events. Although much Russian land was already in Polish hands, and although a prime object of Russian policy was to recover it, a *modus vivendi* might still have been found had Poland acted in a friendly manner during the terrible and revolutionary ordeal through which Russia was doomed to pass. If approached in the right way, Russia might have forborne to press her claims to her ancient heritage. A mighty Slavonic confederation, one ventures to think, might have been formed, in which cultured, intelligent and lively Poland would almost certainly have been the predominant partner.

But the treaties in 1617 and 1618 with Sweden and Poland respectively confirmed another partition of Russian land, and in this one Poland was an active agent: in the former she had only shared in lands won from Russia by Lithuania (not at the time of their acquisition her partner). How could Russia fail to resent such action? How could she fail to cherish irreconcilable enmity to her treacherous and greedy neighbour? How could she but be confirmed in her redemption policy? And yet but little weight is given in Polish histories to this act of

<sup>1</sup> See map at end of book.

spoliation on the part of the Poles : indeed, merely passing reference to it is usually made. The Poles are represented rather as a people not given to conquest, but forced into wars by the hostile actions of predatory neighbours.

Friend and foe alike paint the Slav for us as gentle, resigned, pitiful, unaggressive. This is the character of the Russian peasant as portrayed in Tolstoy's novels. This made the value of the primitive Slav in the slave-markets of the world. He had little capacity for business or organization, but much for endurance and doggedly, yet dreamily, carrying on in the face of bitter adversity. Slavonic territorial expansion, whether Russian or Polish, has as a rule been due to the pressure of economic necessity, and has progressed almost involuntarily. No Pole was ever found in the ranks of those mercenary armies which miraculously sprang up wherever fighting was toward, and enabled mediæval republics, no less than mediæval kings, to embroil Europe in perpetual predatory wars. The art of "peaceful penetration," however, a penetration without guile or malice aforethought, was theirs, and may have been learned from them by later and more proficient and conscious practitioners of it !

In modern times we know that it has been very generally held that the whole history of the Poles may be summed up, in the words of the great French historian Rambaud, as "one long record of military adventure and political aggression." On the surface that may seem to be so, but the Poles do not appear to have regarded military glory as an end in itself as did the Crusaders and the feudal knights. Count von Moltke—no friend of Poland—says that "the example of her neighbours forced Poland to establish a standing army," and goes on to show that the regulations governing it precluded the formation of a strong military state. For the army was not placed under the immediate control of the king. He appointed a Royal Field-Marshal for Poland and one for Lithuania, but he could not deprive them of office, and therefore had little or no control over them. "A definite portion of the revenue was not set aside for the support of the

army, but subsidies were voted by each Diet," or not voted, for it always lay within the power of its members, or of any one of them, to withhold supplies or to explode an accommodating Diet, and not infrequently this was done.

In face of this array of testimony and from actual historical fact, we may, we think, take it as agreed that Poland did not aggrandise herself by military means at the expense of her neighbours, always with the one notable exception. But there are reasons for this fact which may be advanced in addition to the essentially pacific nature of the Slav. It was a peculiar feature of the Polish state that those who sanctioned wars and those who (theoretically at least) paid for them and fought in them were the same people. The burden of the war and the brunt of the fighting (when mercenaries were not employed) actually fell on the governing class—the nobles and gentry. Before a man will vote for a war, himself defray its expenses, give up the comfortable country life of which he is fond, and risk his life to carry it on, he must be very well satisfied of its necessity, and of its likelihood to advantage him or his country. "The Polish chevalier," it has been well said, "called no man master. If his services were enlisted in the game of war he must know for what cause he was expected to fight" and approve it. He was by no means always willing to fight for fire-eating kings, or even to provide the sinews of war for them.

Perhaps the spectacular side of war appealed to the Poles more than possible glory or profit to be gained by it. When it was borne in upon them that they must fight or perish, then the Polish gentry assembled in their thousands, "a gay and glittering host" ready with irresistible spirit to overwhelm the foe in disastrous defeat. But in a general way war was not desired, and each Palatinate was supposed to guard its own borders and appeal to others only in dire need.

So we find that if the kings, who after 1572 were elected foreigners and brought with them political notions strange to the home-keeping Polish squires, desired warlike adventures, they had often to pay for them out of their own



pockets and to depend on extraneous aid. Thus, determination to go their own way undisturbed and to do nothing which might enhance the power or prestige of the kings helped to prevent the Poles engaging in wars whose object was gain, territorial or other.

It may reasonably be maintained, too, that the task of Poland as the defender of civilisation against barbarism sufficiently employed her energies, and left her neither time nor means for foreign conquest, had she been inclined for it. Poland was, it has been said, "the ever-watchful outpost of the Slav and Latin worlds—united and crystallised in herself—against the brutal and barbarous military despotism then, as now, existing in, and represented by, the kingdom of Prussia. Her resistance to this menace constitutes the whole of Poland's history since the first battles waged in 963 by the first Polish ruler, Mieszko, until the present day." This, though obviously in some ways an overstatement, is in others an understatement. Its words characterise Poland's relations not only with Prussia, but with the Empire, with Turk and with Tartar. The defensive-offensive was often her best line of action against these cruel and rapacious neighbours. She must maintain herself by force of arms, or cease to exist.

In the case of Lithuania alone a peaceful solution was found of rival interests which might have led to prolonged strife, and to the humiliation of one people or the other. In spite of bickerings and jealousies, the union, gradually perfected, was on the whole honourably maintained by both nations. The Preamble of the Act of Horodlo states, in almost scriptural language, the high principles on which this unique union was based. It says: 'How can that endure which has not its foundations upon love? . . . Whoso invokes its (love's) aid will find peace and safety, and have no fear of future ill.' In this spirit of goodwill did two free and powerful states, whose territory was larger than that of Germany before the Great War, compose their differences and agree to work together in amity. How changed was their spirit when presented with an opportunity either to aid Muscovy



to settlement and health, or to enrich themselves at her expense!

"The partition of Russian territory by Sweden and Poland," wrote the late Lord Salisbury, "took place (nearly two centuries) before the Partition of Poland, but was parallel to it from many points of view. Both were carefully timed so as to take advantage of a period of internal anarchy. Both began by seating the nominee of the partitioning Power upon the throne of the country, and ended by a seizure of territory. Both were undertaken with the professed object of advancing a religious creed as well as an ambitious dynasty. Both were open to the reproach of disregarding treaty engagements. They only differed in one point. Catherine united to her Empire people who already belonged to its race and its religion; Sigismund annexed to his kingdom peoples who were aliens to it in both."

It is undeniable that after the middle of the sixteenth century the policy of Poland towards Muscovy underwent a change, and the main cause of this may probably be found in the alterations about that time in the status of the Polish crown. It is necessary to remember that in 1569 the conditions on which the crown of Lithuania-Poland was held were completely changed. Previous to the Union of Lublin in that year the Jagellon dynasty had in reality worn two crowns, that of Lithuania being held separately from that of Poland. The intrigues of Great Novgorod, for example, were conducted with the Grand Duchy, not with "The Crown," as Poland proper was styled. The party in Novgorod which desired separation from Muscovy proposed union with Lithuania, which kept up an intermittent strife with Muscovy, not with Poland, whose relations with Muscovy were usually fairly friendly.<sup>1</sup> This attitude on the part of Novgorod, whose own sovereigns, the Tsars, had the extinction of her cherished liberties as a main object of their policy, was not unnatural. Casimir IV was Grand Duke of Lithuania before he became

<sup>1</sup> As an example of this we may cite the fact that Basil II of Russia actually made Casimir IV of Poland guardian of his children.

king of Poland. His mother was Orthodox. Lithuania, his hereditary domain, five-sixths of whose people were Orthodox, was the land of his birth and the object of his constant solicitude. He might be regarded as a Russian prince almost equally with the Tsar himself, and the people of Novgorod may have taken this view. As Grand Duke of Lithuania he was undisputed ruler over millions of Orthodox subjects obedient to the ancient Russian Metropolitan See of Kiev. The joint state of Lithuania-Poland might have been excused had it asserted that its title to the 'inheritance of St. Vladimir' was at least as good as that of Muscovy, which had absolutely no claim to the inheritance when ancient Rus collapsed. Muscovy's princes were but humble persons then, of the house of Rurik certainly, but almost its obscurest members. Lithuania-Poland might also have argued that it was in possession of the greater part of old Rus, and had been so for generations. Neither was it a foregone conclusion in those days that Muscovy would finally prevail over Poland and become the great Slav Power. To all outward seeming the probability was the other way.

But the dynasty of the Jagellons came to an end with Sigismund II, and with it their policy based on the inherent character of their joint kingdom, and especially, as the senior partner, on that of Poland. The constitution was radically altered and the sovereigns ceased to be hereditary. The kingly prerogative was further curtailed at each election, and power passed over to the electors, the majority of whom were ultra-conservative country squires, as unfit to judge of matters of foreign policy as they were unwilling to leave them to others.

The policy of aggression against Muscovy really began<sup>1</sup> with Stephen Bathory, practically the first of the elected kings. Stephen's armies consisted almost exclusively of highly trained Hungarian and German infantry—he had promised not to use the Polish cavalry for foreign service—and he had excellent artillery. His Polish subjects viewed

<sup>1</sup> The perennial warfare between Lithuania and Livonia hardly counts in this connection.

his initial victories with alarm rather than pleasure. They granted him the smallest reinforcements, and these resented the strict discipline imposed by this great commander, and were consequently of little use. Nevertheless, with foreign aid, Stephen gained such successes that a most favourable peace was signed at Zapolsk in 1582. Its provisions obliged Ivan IV to cede the whole of Livonia, and with it for the time all hope of natural development<sup>1</sup> for Muscovy. No wonder that Ivan was slow to make peace on such terms, though he knew his troops were no match for their skilful opponents. In his impatience Stephen challenged Ivan to decide the long-drawn-out contest by a personal encounter. The Moscow princes, however, were never heroes, and Ivan preferred to "skulk away and hide," as his fiery antagonist put it!

To Stephen succeeded Sigismund III, whose Russian policy and its consequences we have outlined above. His ambitious plans grounded on the shoals of Polish pacifism and parsimony, on the ever-present fear of the gentry that a monarch upborne on the popularity of a successful war might, in the full flush of the prestige conferred by it, curtail their excessive and anomalous privileges. That that must be the policy of every king they well knew, and they left nothing undone which might frustrate it.

On a review of all the circumstances of the case the conclusion appears to be justified that Poland's lapse from grace in adopting a policy of aggression against Muscovy may be laid at the door of her foreign kings. Like all other kings of their day, they sought the aggrandisement of their country as its greatest good, and they lay, moreover, under the temptation of unique opportunities. We may perhaps also conclude that had the old dynasty of Poland—exceptionally able, prudent and far-seeing as it was—been still on the throne when "The Time of Troubles" overtook Muscovy, its handling of the situation would have been less rash, less piratical, and more successful than Sigismund's. Its policy would, now that Lithuania was really incorporated with Poland, have followed the

<sup>1</sup> Sweden about this time closed the Gulf of Finland also to Muscovy.

traditional line of Polish policy. This line was not, as we have attempted to prove, usually one of conquest, however we may elect to account for the fact. The fatal policy actually pursued by Sweden and Poland at this time led directly to the reduction of the powerful Sweden of Charles XII to the rank of a third-class state by Peter the Great a century later, and to the final incorporation of the kingdom of Poland with Russia by Nicholas I two centuries later.

### THIRD PHASE.

For many years after the Truce of Deulino (1618) the Tsars had not the means for a forward policy in regard to territory in dispute between them and Poland. But there can be no doubt that the action of the latter during the Muscovite crisis rankled. That action, looked at in the light of subsequent events, was one of extreme rashness and folly. Poland herself then set the example of interference with the succession to the throne of a neighbouring Power, of taking advantage of its weakness to deal it a fratricidal blow, while by her own political system she actually invited foreign Powers to follow her example. Her elective system gave them the opportunity to seat, if they could, a king harmless to them upon the Polish throne, or better still, a king whom they could control in their own interests, and they were not slow to take advantage of it. Indeed, Poland's turbulence and confusion made such action almost a matter of reasonable precaution in the interests of their own subjects and their own thrones, or so they affected to believe. Thus from the very inception of her elected monarchy Poland became the happy hunting-ground of European diplomats, each bidding against the other for her suffrages, and of candidates, of whom there was never any lack, for the burdensome honour of her throne. And she suffered in honour and estate for it. At each election she sank lower into the morass of turbulence, venality and misgovernment into which she was pressed by her interested neighbours, and out of which she had ever less strength to lift herself.



Russia, however, only came into the field of European statecraft after the time of Peter the Great, who, chiefly by the recovery of territory lost to Sweden, effectually "opened a window" for her to the West. The Empress Catherine was the first Russian sovereign well fitted to take a hand in the intricate game of international diplomacy, and she did it to purpose. The Polish question had ripened by her time under the skilful and attentive husbandry of watchful neighbours who made it their business to sow tares among the Polish wheat, already sufficiently choked by noxious weeds of native growth.

Meantime Poland was herself pursuing a policy whose chief effect was to alienate her subjects in her eastern provinces. A fierce religious persecution of the Orthodox inhabitants of the Ukraine (rightless serfs and unregistered Cossacks) was carried on in the belief that they would be better Poles if they were Catholics. This policy was contrary to that wide toleration which had hitherto honourably distinguished Poland among the nations. It was the more reprehensible because some time after the formation of the Uniat Church the Diet had fully recognised the standing of this, the Polish Orthodox Church, with its Bishops and Metropolitan, and had confirmed its title to its property. Now their churches were taken from "Schismatics" <sup>1</sup> and handed over to Catholics. The very churchyards were violated, and the bodies of departed Orthodox peasants cast out that they might not defile those of Catholic converts who should be buried there. Nor were the Jesuit inquisitors the only oppressors of these poor people. What small amount of worldly goods was left them by the rapacity of the lords or their agents was taken by Jews and middlemen. Tried beyond endurance, they rose in rebellion and turned to the Cossacks for aid.

The origin of the Cossacks <sup>2</sup> is not very well understood,

<sup>1</sup> This was surely a misnomer for people whose Orthodoxy was older than Poland's Catholicism.

<sup>2</sup> The word "Cossack" is of Tartar origin and is said to have meant a robber, but it seems to have been first applied to wandering labourers who took work by the day.

but they are first mentioned about the time of the decline of the Mongol domination of Russia. As has been already explained, the vast steppes, which stretch in a wide belt across South Russia from the Dniester to the Urals, were in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries without fixed population. Bands of Tartars roamed over them, and they formed a sort of backwoods where runaway serfs found refuge and freedom, and where the abundant game of the prairies and the teeming fish of the rivers provided an easy sustenance. There were many such emigrants, both from Muscovy and Poland, in those days, when the exactions of the taxgatherers in the former, and the demands of the masters in both, tended ever to increase. A life in the open, arms in hand, masterless and workless, attracted the more adventurous spirits of all the neighbouring districts.<sup>1</sup> The Cossacks multiplied and increased exceedingly, and grew rich on stolen booty. They were a menace to all peaceable people, and frequently embroiled both Poland and Muscovy, whose control over such active subjects was only nominal, with the Porte.

The Cossacks in time formed independent settlements on all the chief South Russian rivers, and had a remarkable military republic, a fortified post on a group of islands in the Dnieper, called the Sech, where no women were permitted to live. The Dnieper Cossacks owed allegiance to Poland; those on the more easterly rivers to Muscovy. All alike elected their own officials, including their Hetman, whose standard was a horsetail. The Hetman was responsible for his conduct in office to his own Cossack General Assembly alone. The Dnieperian Hetman received the insignia of office from the Polish king direct, and was under obligation to serve him in war, just as the Hetmans of Poland and Lithuania were. It is clear that the Cossacks were thus independent of the Diet, and the kings

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Latham, in *Nationalities of Europe*, says that the Cossacks of the Ukraine were "politically Poles or Turks (or Russians), according to the frontier: ethnologically Poles, Kumanians, Crimean Tartars, Wallachians, Moldavians, Bukovinians, Galicians, Yaldzvingis and Lithuanians. . . . Upon the whole they were Little Russian Slavs of Latin, Greek, Moham-medan, Pagan or Jewish religion."

often had their support when denied Polish money or men.

This irregular and irresponsible force was an effective and a generally loyal frontier guard, both for Poland and Muscovy, against Turkish and Tartar marauders. Stephen Bathory gave his Cossacks a regular status by enrolling six thousand of them in regiments for the defence of the border. The Cossacks thus registered were allotted districts to live in, and were allowed payment in money and in kind for their services : but very many of them were left unregistered, and were liable to be claimed by the lords as runaway serfs, which was a standing grievance. The number of registered Cossacks was increased from time to time, or diminished, as Poland felt herself strong enough to deal with them, and their payments were constantly in arrears. They therefore became chronically rebellious, and were, as in 1636 and 1638, put down with a strong and merciless hand. In 1648 they broke into open revolt under Bogdan Chmielnicki <sup>1</sup> and joined the peasants, whose grievances (detailed above) had now come to a head, in a fearful jacquerie which laid waste whole districts and exterminated many noble families. The peasants subjected their erstwhile masters to every description of barbarous torture and burnt their homes to the ground. Human flesh was sold in the open market, and babies were roasted and eaten before their mothers' eyes. Every Catholic or Uniat priest who fell into their hands was hanged between a Jew and a pig. The religious wrongs of the Orthodox peasantry were fresh in mind and added fanatical zest to their fury. From the Ukraine the insurgents penetrated into Poland, and soon set the Palatinates of Podolia and Volhynia also literally in a blaze.

The case of the Cossack leader Bogdan Chmielnicki was in most respects typical of the attitude of the Polish grandees at that time. He had been subjected to tyrannical ill-usage by the agent of a Polish lord, who raided the village which had been given to his father by the king

<sup>1</sup> Bogdan is the exact Russian equivalent for Theodore. Chmielnicki is pronounced Khmyel-neets'-kee.

personally as a reward of faithful services in the field, massacred his people, and flogged his child to death. He went to Warsaw to lay his wrongs before the king, and obtained the sympathy and favour of Wladislaw IV, who made him recruiting officer of the Cossacks. But he did not obtain justice in the courts against the noble lord who coveted the vineyard of this Naboth. The judges pronounced that legally, not being a "privileged" person, he had no claim, though he was no man's serf and under the jurisdiction of no overlord. Oppression and injustice followed him on his return to the Ukraine. He fled to the Sech, was elected Hetman of the Cossacks, made a compact with the Crimean Khan, and was soon marching against Poland at the head of a formidable Cossack-Tartar host which was able to annihilate Polish forces of fourteen thousand men sent against him, and which helped the peasants with their work of vengeance and destruction. Bogdan even appealed to the Tsar to invade Poland jointly with him, for he knew he could not long continue the contest alone.

Though at first Tsar Alexis made no hostile move, the Poles were thoroughly alarmed. The nobles, now aroused to the seriousness of the danger they had despised and refused to arm against, assembled to the number of forty thousand, besides artillery and gunners, and marched against the rebels. This strong and confident force, recruited from the ranks of Polish chivalry, from the so-called Equestrian Order which embodied all the brilliant traditions of Polish military glory, was completely defeated. The Cossacks gained enormous loot after the battle by the plunder of rich arms and accoutrements from the dead bodies of their high-born adversaries. John Casimir, whose troubled reign commenced under these inauspicious circumstances, tried to open negotiations with Chmielnicki, whose success had turned his head and who now styled himself "Prince of Russia." He was reduced to a more reasonable frame of mind by a severe defeat at Zborow, after which the Tartars left him. The struggle continued, however, with varying fortune. Chmielnicki intrigued



with Poland's southern neighbours, Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania, and finally threw off his allegiance to Poland, declaring that thenceforth his sovereign was "The Lord's Anointed, the Tsar of Muscovy." In 1654 he swore fealty to Alexis, who confirmed the privileged autonomy of the Cossacks and enlarged their registered number to sixty thousand. This was a really important step in the struggle between the Slav Powers, and marked the first loss to Poland. It naturally led to a war with Muscovy, which lasted some thirteen years.

In the year 1655 the Swedish king fell upon Poland from the north, without the smallest excuse or provocation and in defiance of treaty engagements. The Elector of Brandenburg (who as Duke of Prussia was a Polish vassal) and the Hetman of Lithuania went over to him. Others of the Polish commanders also proved to be traitors, and the rest were unwilling to fight even in this crisis<sup>1</sup> of their country's fate, so the king and the court had to take refuge in Silesia. Charles X of Sweden swept forward over Western Poland and carried all before him, including the two capitals; the Muscovites penetrated the north-east, while Chmielnicki devastated Galicia and the south-east. It seemed as if the invaders had nothing to do but to divide the lands of the Republic between them. Its partition was actually proposed, and would have presented no difficulty had not the Swedes and the Muscovites quarrelled over the spoils. At this juncture, too, John Casimir found a friend in Austria, which regarded the doings of the filibustering Powers with an uneasy mind. Also, fortunately for Poland, just then national spirit revived wonderfully. For the Swedes besieged Czenstowchowa,<sup>2</sup> the Polish national shrine, but all the resources of their trained armies failed against the spirit with which its Prior Augustin Kordecki defended it. This miraculous success<sup>3</sup>—for so the Poles regarded it—kindled a flame

<sup>1</sup> "Those who have the greatest stake in this country do the least for it," was Sobieski's bitter remark on a similar occasion.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounce Chenstokbóva.

<sup>3</sup> The Poles attributed their deliverance to the favour of the Virgin Mary, who was ever after invoked by them as "Queen of Poland."

of patriotic ardour throughout the land. It was in vain that Charles X won brilliant victories in the war which he found was only beginning, that he captured towns, that his Transylvanian ally brought a huge force of wild troops to his aid : the Poles were not daunted, and they gradually emerged out of their difficulties.

After the death of Chmielnicki in 1657 a Polish partisan was elected Cossack Hetman in his place, and a general amnesty was proclaimed which disposed of the Cossack peril for the time, though the question of their allegiance remained unsettled. The Elector of Brandenburg was bought off by his release from the obligation to do homage for East Prussia. This duchy had descended to him from the Hohenzollern who was the last Grand Master of the Teutonic Order. It now became the Elector's absolutely, and this transaction confirmed the identification of the house of Hohenzollern with Prussia, the state that under Frederick the Great about a hundred years later was to have so sinister an effect on Poland's fate. Thus deserted by her allies, Sweden agreed in 1660 to retire from Poland, and she only retained part of Livonia out of all her conquests. But a clause in the Peace of Oliva, signed in that year, had far-reaching consequences : it bound Poland to respect the liberties of the Protestant Dissidents. This treaty was guaranteed by, among other Powers, England and Brandenburg, and gave them a certain right of interference in Poland if it was not carefully observed by her. This was Frederick's *point d'appui* for his policy which led to the Partition of Poland.

War, punctuated by abortive peace negotiations, continued to rage with Muscovy, until in 1667 the Truce of Andrusovo, confirmed later by the Peace of Moscow, was signed. By its terms Poland gave up all her possessions on the east bank of the Dnieper, and also Kiev on the west bank with a small district round it. The Dnieperian Cossacks, too, definitely passed from her suzerainty. This treaty stripped her of all she had gained by the Peace of Deulino half a century before, and more : it marked a second, and even more decisive,

step in her decline. Thenceforth Muscovy became in ever-growing measure the great Slav Power.

If the Treaty of Oliva provided the Protestant Powers with an excuse for interference in Poland's internal affairs, the Treaty of Moscow, which John Sobieski ratified so reluctantly, did the same for Muscovy. For one of its stipulations pledged Poland to cease from troubling the Orthodox Dissidents, a stipulation which the great magnates as a rule ignored. Their efforts to force their Orthodox serfs into Catholicism, continued throughout the eighteenth century, are only explicable, in view of the temperamental tolerance of the Poles, as a measure of supposed political insurance. Their sole effect, however, was to drive the oppressed people into anti-nationalism, so far as they had any political leanings at all. Certain it is that when Catherine, ostensibly on their behalf, entered on the course which resulted in the partition of their country, the peasants made no sign. Rather they made things more difficult for the last Polish king by two risings in defence of their faith, and they passed over to the Russian Empire without a word of objection, or a stroke in defence of Polish freedom.

At the time of the fateful Treaty of Moscow, however, Muscovy was far behind Western Europe, behind Poland also, in every sphere—moral, intellectual, political and economic—so much so that any adequate prediction made then of her future greatness would have sounded fantastic. The stupid conservatism and arrogant aloofness and self-satisfaction of her people would alone have made such progress seem impossible. But Muscovy was creeping forward, and the epoch of Peter the Great was at hand when she would be violently shaken out of her ruts, to be followed by that of Catherine II when she would step into the full light of European day. The time was coming, too, when, under Alexander I and Nicholas I, Russia—Muscovy the backward and barbarous no longer—would assume the rôle of arbiter of the destinies of Europe, while Poland figured, first as her subject state, then as merely her "Provinces of the Vistula!"

But all that was as yet far under the horizon. Poland still bulked large in the world's eye, and the military genius of Sobieski gave her in the latter half of the eighteenth century an air of strength and power sadly belied by the sordid reality of wrangling, discontent, disloyalty and venality which underlay it.

The election of a successor to John III (Sobieski) was the first with which Russia interfered. Stanislaw Leszczyński's candidature was favoured by Peter the Great's enemies, Sweden and France, and was therefore successfully opposed by Peter because his accession would throw the weight of Poland also against Russia. At the next vacancy large Russian forces were employed to overawe the Diet, which obediently elected Augustus III against the wishes of practically the whole nation. From that time the Russian Government regularly set aside a fund for direct use in Poland: it held that it was cheaper and easier to purchase patriots than to conquer them! In this way Russia made Poland so utterly her satellite that at the next (and last) election her candidate was not opposed by any other, nor was force required to coerce the Diet, though many troops were at hand in case of need. Poland had now become Russia's buffer state, a mere political derelict only suffered to exist as long as its use as a fender continued.

To sum up: Poland and Russia were set upon different paths by their adoption of rival religious systems most fervently held. To their spiritual division was added a political feud when, by her union with Lithuania, Poland became possessed of a great part of the original Russian territory, while that unfortunate state disappeared from the European family of nations under the Tartar inundation, and behind the powerful kingdom of her Slav rival. When she emerged, it was as Muscovy, a state new to Europe, and different in many ways from the old Rus—different in the strong and statesmanlike policy of her princes, who in process of time reversed the constitutional usage of Rus and became hereditary autocrats.

Meanwhile Poland had ceased to be governed by the



equally strong, statesmanlike and politic Jagellon dynasty, and had assumed the form of a crowned Republic with elected sovereigns. She was then incomparably the more powerful, and was able under her foreign kings to take advantage of Muscovy's weakness.

But the centralisation of Muscovy eventually gave her an immense pull over decentralised and more or less anarchical Poland. The inevitable struggle for the recovery of the Russian provinces in the grip of Poland began as soon as Muscovy felt herself strong enough to attempt it, and proceeded with varying fortunes for several generations. Equipoise was reached in the earlier half of the seventeenth century, and Poland's decline had clearly begun during the later half. The scales proved to be weighted in favour of Muscovy, and Poland's governing class, the nobility and gentry, would allow nothing to be done to redress the balance. Her ultimate fate was certain, and the only matter for wonder is that it was so long delayed.

## VIII

### THE PARTITIONS OF POLAND

1772.

MUCH has been written in condemnation of the Partition of Poland as a political crime unparalleled at least in modern history. Justification there was none for the second act of partition: it was a wanton and deliberate transgression of international decency and fair dealing on the part of its perpetrators. But the first, which is the one usually referred to in such diatribes, may reasonably be allowed to stand on a different footing. It was perhaps, as Dr. Latham<sup>1</sup> puts it, more an amputation than a partition. By it Prussia severed from Poland districts which, on the whole not without some measure of justice, she regarded as decidedly more German than Polish. To them an authoritative exponent<sup>2</sup> of German opinion says "Prussia had an inherent historic title. . . . They consisted, in fact, of German territory which had never been thoroughly incorporated into the Polish community," and which, he also suggests, had not prospered in Polish hands as they would have done in German. With parts of his argument we are in agreement, but we would remind our readers, firstly, that the acquisition of West Prussia by Frederick rendered the indisputably Polish river Vistula practically useless for Polish commerce, and was intended to do so, and that its loss was therefore a vital blow to that country; and, secondly, that the Teutonic Order, of which the Hohenzollerns had served

<sup>1</sup> *Nationalities of Europe.*

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Höttsch, *Cambridge Modern History.*

themselves heirs, was in the thirteenth century *invited* by Poland to come to *her* provinces. Certainly the Knights made those provinces more or less their own, but they definitely ceded West Prussia to Poland in 1466, and they did homage for East Prussia to the Polish kings until 1656. Their claim, therefore, rests less on historic right than on political and economic expediency. On the other hand, the territory that Russia amputated on this occasion from the body of Poland is by common consent allowed to have been Russian originally, its inhabitants of her race and religion. Austria's assault was purely gratuitous: the limb she lopped had never been anything but Polish.

The first Partition, then, was clearly a crime; but its blackness and infamy, had it stood alone, were by no means great according to the political morality of its day; neither was it an unprecedented crime. Rather we find it to be in line with the habitual methods of statecraft of all European nations. Each Power then unblushingly possessed itself of what portion of its neighbours' territories were specially coveted by it, under the mostly very inadequate cover of its "rights," or its "interests." Examples are not hard to find. The inheritance of Spain was partitioned by the diplomacy of William III and Louis XIV; Silesia was snatched from Austria by Prussia; Sweden and Poland, as we know, had early in the seventeenth century assisted at a dismemberment of Russia when she was almost *in extremis*; Britain herself absorbed the colonial Empire of France without a qualm, but, as it were, in an unpremeditated aside. Such partitions were usually carefully prepared for, and notably so in the case of Poland.

Perhaps the attributes of the Polish Partition which have seemed to mark it out as different from, and more shameful than, all others, and which have specially offended the conscience of mankind, are the disgraceful greed and rapacity of the Powers that carried it out, their hypocritical pretences, and their unjustifiable interference on their own behalf with the affairs of their intended

victim. Anarchy<sup>1</sup> in Poland was "agreeable to the interests" of other states, so their "whole policy should consist in fostering it," as one of them cynically avowed. The years immediately preceding the Partition of 1772 were practically the first in all Poland's history when, had she been let alone, there was a good prospect of her reforming her constitution and setting up a strong government. But it was just in view of this prospect that her neighbours realised how clearly it was to their interest to keep her weak and divided.

It was a piece of bad luck for Poland that the rulers of Russia and Prussia at that conjuncture should have been almost the strongest that those countries have had. The Empress Catherine II, far-sighted, tenacious and ambitious, was one of the ablest and most enterprising of Russian sovereigns. Russia itself was now very different from the backwoodsman that Peter had set out to civilise and start upon a European career. Its Empress was of German birth and its bureaucracy was organised on German lines, its soldiers trained by foreign officers, its strength and its possessions growing day by day. In Frederick of Prussia, also, Poland had at this time an antagonist able enough, and unscrupulous beyond even the average of his unscrupulous house. "Spoliation<sup>2</sup> was the hereditary tradition of his race. The whole history of the kingdom over which he ruled was a history of lawless annexations. It was formed of territory filched from other Powers, and from no Power so liberally as Poland." Frederick's policy may be summed up in the cynical question he once put to his ministers: "When you have the advantage, are you to use it or not?" His own opinion on the subject was amply demonstrated by his habitual disregard of treaties and alliances unless "fastened by the band . . . of interest."

Both Powers found, unfortunately, in the protection

<sup>1</sup> It was to the advantage of Prussia that anarchy should "be kept up in Poland," says Dr. Höttsch, in order that "the pressure long exercised by that Power along the Prussian border (should be) proportionately weakened."

<sup>2</sup> Lord Salisbury, *Poland*.



of minorities of their own faith in Poland a more or less valid excuse for intervention, one that had providently been prepared over a century before the first Partition took place. The Poles, partly from fanaticism and partly from annoyance at foreign dictation, refused to comply with their undoubted treaty obligations in the matter of equal treatment of Dissidents, and so put themselves in the wrong and at the same time gave Catherine and Frederick the weapon they needed.

These two somewhat like-minded sovereigns even covenanted together to maintain Poland's vicious constitution. In their treaty of 1764 they described any reform as "injurious and dangerous to neighbouring states." In a secret article they guarded the mischievous power of the Veto as solicitously as if it had been a fundamental privilege of their own subjects. These altruists therein declared that they would put down by armed force any who should try to deprive Poland of this right—a right which Poland herself was at that very time discussing with a view to its abolition as a danger to the state! They deliberately conspired to tie Poland down to the vicious circle in which she was moving, that her fate might be the surer and their gain the easier.

Austria, on the other hand, since Sobieski saved Vienna from the Turks, had been on friendly terms with Poland, whom she regarded as a useful possible ally against Russia or Turkey. Her friendship was not, however, one that would withstand strain or sacrifice, and as she could not by herself save Poland, she determined at least to get her share—an *equal* share, as Maria Theresa bargained—of the pound of flesh. Clearly here was a combination—intellect, ambition, lawless greed, faithless friendship—with which poor guileless leaderless Poland was quite unfitted to cope. Probably even a strong Poland, her constitution reformed and her government centralised, would have gone down before such powerful, ruthless and unscrupulous enemies.

And Poland then and later looked in vain for help elsewhere,

Between her and France there was a tradition of friendship: Polish young men had sought counsel of Rousseau and Voltaire; they had patterned their culture and their political creed on those of advanced French thought. But when Poland, threatened with a second partition, requested French aid, the genuineness of the reform of her constitution was declared doubtful: it was held by the Assembly that the democracy of France had no obligation to support an aristocratic revolution!

Britain's attitude to the Polish question was governed by her hostility to France. During the early days of the Revolution she remained neutral, but with the execution of Louis XVI her object, tirelessly pursued for over twenty years, was by all means to destroy the military power of France, and to subvert the ambitious projects of Napoleon which were turning Europe upside down. Britain was horrified at the infamy of the Partitions; but Poland was ostentatiously the friend of France, which in the circumstances made it difficult to aid her. Appeals for British help, when the second Partition was imminent, were met with the statement that England and her ally Holland could not usefully intervene on Poland's behalf "without much greater exertion and expense than the maintenance of their separate interests could possibly justify." True and prudent, no doubt, but hardly heroic!

In her distress Poland even appealed to Turkey. But that Power was less inclined to come to her aid than others, and with reason. She preferred that Russian armies should be engaged on Polish soil rather than on hers, and Catherine's restless ambition made that the only alternative.

The operative reasons behind the dismemberment of Poland were quite simple.

Prussia believed the acquisition of certain Polish districts to be essential to her economic interests<sup>1</sup> and her geographical unity, and, to do her justice, had never made any secret of her belief. She felt, too, that since the acces-

<sup>1</sup> By the gain of West Prussia she would control the imports and exports of Poland in her own interests.

sion of Stanislaw Poniatowski the frontier of Poland had, as far as foreign policy was concerned, become the frontier of Russia, and that Russia endangered the Balance of Power by her virtual command of the army of fifty thousand men which Poland had contracted with her to maintain. It would be highly impolitic to allow Russia to absorb the whole of Poland, which would strengthen her claim to be "Dominium Maris Baltici" and give her the Vistula; or even, alternatively, give her time to make herself mistress of the Danubian Principalities,<sup>1</sup> or of Constantinople. One, or all, of these achievements seemed to be probable results of Russian expansionism: she was, according to the German view, prevented from realising any of them by Frederick's partition policy. These benefits were doubtless, as Germans confess, "secured at the cost of Polish independence"; but that seemed then, and seemed still a hundred years later, to German apologists<sup>2</sup> but as dust in the balance.

Austria could plead no racial, economic or geographical necessity: but she also felt compelled to maintain the Balance of Power which would sway dangerously against her did the other autocracies become too wealthy or great. With her the Polish question was one mainly of equilibrium and prestige which fortunately did not call for sacrifices, but rather permitted a pleasurable satisfaction of political greed. Maria Theresa was at first averse to the policy, and experienced pricks of conscience. She wrote to her sympathetic minister, Prince Kaunitz: "A prince has no other rights than a private person. . . . What will France, Spain and England say of the transaction? Let us pass for feeble rather than for dishonest folk." But her son, the Emperor Joseph, and

<sup>1</sup> Moldavia and Wallachia.

<sup>2</sup> Prince von Bülow wrote: "An independent Poland is incompatible with the vital interests of Germany. In no circumstances can Germans forget that the Prussian monarchy has grown strong through the discomfiture of the Republic of Poland. . . . Surely our national duty is not only to retain but to increase (if that be possible) our possessions in the west of Poland. Political exigencies impose on us sometimes hard necessities which bring much pain to our heart, but which no sentimental feeling should influence us to dispute. . . . No regard for Polish nationality should be allowed to paralyse our efforts."

eventually Kaunitz also, were against her. Tearfully she entered into the conspiracy, and proved to have, as Frederick caustically remarked, "a very good appetite."

The exigencies of the Balance of Power weighed with Russia also, but she was much more concerned with what would now be called a "rectification" of her frontier. Russia's natural line of expansion was towards the Baltic and the West, and in this direction there were millions of her nationals under Polish rule: their redemption was an age-long ambition of hers which only awaited an opportunity, as Poland could hardly fail to know. Yet Catherine's own ambitions lay rather in the direction of Turkey than of Poland: dreams of the glories of a revived Byzantine Empire allured her. A free channel to the Mediterranean was in Russian eyes then, as always, a desirable thing, and, had not Polish complications intervened, might have been secured at that time.

The dismemberment of Poland, then, was not Catherine's policy, and promised her but little profit. She professed that there was no need to extend the limits of an empire which already consisted of "a large part of the terrestrial globe." When the partition policy was first proposed to her by Frederick in 1769 she answered evasively, and no doubt calculated that the plan would lapse as similar plans had done before. Russia's position with regard to Poland was quite comfortable as it was. Her influence there was dominant, the king her obedient servant. She had even concluded a treaty with Poland whereby the latter had agreed never to change the constitution and the alliance which gave Russia hegemony over her. This treaty provided Russia with a buffer state which was far safer and more useful than a frontier coterminous with those of her great neighbours would be. She had only to sit still and enjoy the *status quo* while it lasted, and if, later, a different policy became advisable, she had no doubt that she could find an opportunity to swallow Poland whole.

But the other Powers contrived to force Catherine's hand, and she fell in with the partition scheme, which was



declared by all three Powers jointly to be necessary "considering the general confusion <sup>1</sup> in which the Republic of Poland exists by the dissension of its leading men, and the perversity of all its citizens." Prolonged and involved negotiations took place over the extent of the spoils and their division, and meanwhile all three monarchs advanced their troops <sup>2</sup> into Poland and occupied the lands they proposed to annex. Finally the matter was adjusted,<sup>3</sup> and "in order to restore tranquillity," as they made profession, the robber empires were ready to "enforce claims upon Poland which were as ancient as they were legitimate." By "an arrangement beneficent to all three," each of the participants secured "an advantage for itself," thus fulfilling the pleasing prediction of Prince Henry of Prussia, who had shared in the diplomatic labours of his brother.

Frederick did not get all he coveted, but, said he, "It is a very good bargain: the command of the Vistula will necessarily lead to the acquisition of Dantzic at some future time." In pretended moderation some morsels were left which would still keep Prussian eyes riveted on Polish lands, and serve as a pretext for a later partition! Maria Theresa admitted, for her part: "Right is not on my side: my engagements, and equity, and common sense are against me," but nevertheless contentedly absorbed her allotted share. Catherine agreed to the

<sup>1</sup> Schlosser, a German authority, states that in the month of May, 1767, there were no fewer than 187 confederations, and that every Pole but the king belonged to one or other.

<sup>2</sup> Plague was raging in Poland in 1770, and the Germanic Powers advanced their troops as so-called *cordons sanitaires* to the Polish frontier and beyond it.

<sup>3</sup> By the First Partition Russia gained a large part of White Russia, the Western Dwina and the Drut (a tributary of the Dnieper) becoming the frontier, and 1,600,000 inhabitants; Prussia gained East Prussia except the cities of Dantzic and Thorn and the tiny province of Ermeland, and 600,000 inhabitants; Austria gained the whole of Galicia with its valuable salt-mines, and 2,600,000 inhabitants. The total population of Poland at the time of the first Partition is variously estimated at from fifteen to over twenty millions. Of these Foster (after Plater) says that 6,700,000 were Poles; 7,520,000 White and Red Russians; 2,110,000 Jews; 1,900,000 Lithuanians; 1,640,000 Germans; 180,000 Muscovites and Great Russians; 100,000 Wallachians. The number of noble families at the same time is calculated at round about 120,000: but authorities differ.

policy of partition because she could not help it, and she made important territorial gains by it : but on the whole it was a check to her considered policy. She cared no more for Poland's plight than her partners did : but she neither gloated over her victim's misfortune nor pretended to principles higher than those she acted on. A really artistic and characteristic finishing touch was put to the work by Frederick's "trust that the Polish nation will eventually recover from its prejudices, that it will acknowledge the enormous injustice it has done to the house of Brandenburg, and that it will bring itself to repair it by an honourable arrangement." <sup>1</sup>

The feeling produced in Western Europe by this wanton assault of the strong on the weak, accomplished, to quote Lecky, "with no more regard for honour or honesty, or the mere decency of appearances," than might have been shown by "a burglar or a footpad," was that "it shook the political system, lowered the public morals, and weakened the public law of Europe."

Yet perfidy and outrage in every way worse were to come !

1793.

For several years after the first Partition Poland remained politically quiescent, stunned and dispirited. During these years she was nursed back to health by regenerative work quietly carried on by the Poles themselves, and by her comparatively orderly and efficient government. The latter was in effect the work of the Russian ambassador supported by Russian troops, King Stanislaw being retained only to carry out the ambassador's behests and to give them an appearance of constitutional usage.

The leaders of the Poles in the work of reform were Stanislaw Konarski and, above all, Hugo Kallontaj, the enlightened Canon of Cracow Cathedral and Rector of its University. He believed that social and economic changes were more necessary than any others, and the suppression of the Order of Jesus, in whose hands Polish

<sup>1</sup> Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution Française*.

education had been stagnating for generations, gave him his chance. He was able to lay the foundations of a native and living culture. Latin fell into disrepute, and a literature based on the Polish language sprang up. Polish trade with the south also revived and took the place of that which Prussian tariffs were strangling in the north. Then, the time being ripe and the nation prepared for it, the famous Four Years' Diet assembled to carry out the work of constitutional reform, so long overdue. Poland's grand and fatal mistake was that she took four years of leisurely discussion to elaborate her ideas, while time pressed and opportunity passed.

As it happened, the European situation when the Diet met gave Poland a breathing space; nay, it made her politically important again. For Russia and Prussia were now in opposite camps, the former in union with Austria, their policy one of mutual aggrandisement at Turkey's expense; the latter looking about for means to prevent a consummation which would unsettle the Balance of Power and unduly enhance the importance of two empires already sufficiently great. Both sides sought assistance from Poland, and in 1790 Frederick William of Prussia made a treaty<sup>1</sup> with her in which he guaranteed her integrity and her right to a free constitution. Thus encouraged, Poland repudiated the hated Russian régime and proceeded to ratify her new constitution. It was passed *en bloc* on May 3, 1791, after which all adjourned to the cathedral, where it was sworn to and a solemn service of thanksgiving was held. The Sejmiki readily ratified it, and the people enthusiastically approved.

This constitution virtually transformed the Polish oligarchical republic into a monarchy hereditary in the house of Saxony,<sup>2</sup> with a parliament whose powers were

<sup>1</sup> Höttsch calls it "an unnatural alliance." He goes on: "This preposterous agreement precluded the extension and adjustment of the Prussian frontier . . . by the acquisition of Dantzic and Thorn. . . . Yet this end had to be reached if the work of the Hohenzollerns was to attain its organic consummation."

<sup>2</sup> The Elector of Saxony, however, professed his inability to accept the Polish throne except with the consent of the other Powers, which, of course, would never be given.

limited. The burgesses regained their franchise; the peasants ceased to be outlaws and were allowed to purchase their freedom; full religious liberty was granted; ministers were made responsible to the Diet, their function that of advisers to the king in his capacity of chief executive officer. The *Liberum Veto* and the right of confederation, or legalised rebellion, were abolished.

For centuries the Poles had fanatically clung to a governmental system that was rotten, and many of them had resisted every attempt at reform of even the worst abuses. Their death-bed repentance was unavailing, and only served to precipitate their fate.

At first, however, they received congratulations from their ally. On May 16th the Prussian Envoy at Warsaw expressed his master's pleasure at "the firm and decisive conduct of the Estates, which he regards as best fitted to give a solid foundation to the government and prosperity of Poland." Frederick William assured Stanislaw that one of his "most pleasing cares will be to support and draw close the bonds which unite us." After a good deal of persuasion his ministers induced him to repudiate these friendly assurances, and he did so shamelessly. They saw in the Polish choice as king-designate of the Elector of Saxony—one of Prussia's bitterest enemies, a Catholic who was attached to the Austrian interest—a veiled attempt on the part of that Empire to extend its influence over Poland, to recoup itself for its losses at the hand of Prussia, and to obtain at once revenge and indemnity; and Catherine did not fail to urge this view. In 1791 Austria and Prussia agreed to uphold the integrity and *the* free constitution of Poland: early in 1792 they hedged and amended this to *a* free constitution. Prussia explained that the Poland which she had promised to defend was that of 1790, which had been completely transformed by the adoption of a constitution that had been drawn up without her knowledge and concurrence, and that therefore she was under no obligation to defend the Poland of 1792.

Catherine was both alarmed and incensed, for Poland's action was a direct challenge to Russia, and she could



not regard as negligible the advance of Austrian influence to her very borders. The confederation of Targowicz having been formed by a few dissatisfied Polish lords who invoked Russian intervention, the Empress promptly pretended to see in this absolutely insignificant minority<sup>1</sup> the true representatives of the national mind. The confederates urged the overthrow of the new constitution and the restoration by means of Russian bayonets of aristocratic privilege and the former anarchic régime. On May 18th the Russian minister declared that his mistress, "called on by many distinguished Poles who had confederated against the pretended constitution of 1791, would, in virtue of her guarantee, march an army into Poland to restore the liberties of the Republic." Within a week two Russian armies entered Poland, presently to be reinforced by others released by the end of the Turkish war. Poland's new standing army was only coming into existence, but under the leadership of Prince Joseph Poniatowski and Kosciuszko<sup>2</sup> a brave and, for a time, successful struggle was waged. But the two Powers that had by treaty agreed so lately as 1791 to defend Poland if attacked proved faithless. Austria's new Emperor, Francis II, abandoned his father's policy in her support, and Frederick William repudiated his obligations. The resistance of Poland, thus left to her own resources, was soon overcome by the Russian armies, and fresh treaties were signed the effect of which was to ensure Poland's doom. Catherine, however, did not regard the moment as sufficiently favourable to her, and delay occurred in carrying out the sentence.

At that time the monarchical Powers were much exercised by the progress of the Revolution in France, and were inclined to respond to the appeals of Louis XVI for help. This tendency is reflected in their attitude towards Polish affairs. In 1772 Catherine had pretended to safeguard the liberties of the Polish Republic and protect the rights of the Orthodox Dissidents. That pretence

<sup>1</sup> There were in it originally only three great nobles with ten followers.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounce Kosh-tsyoosh'-ko.

was now abandoned, and she talked of "stifling the influences of the horrible tendencies of the dreadful Parisian sect, and of the French demagogues" among the Poles, who had ceased in her estimation to be Catholic persecutors, and had become Jacobins! Catherine had quite lost her early platonic affection for liberalism. She was much shocked by its fruits, produced in the French Revolution, and had sympathy for a fellow-monarch in trouble; but her main concern was to get Austria and Prussia involved in a war with France while she kept out of it and "freed her elbows" for drastic dealing with Poland. Russia could combat the common enemy best in Poland, she said; but by every possible argument she urged Austria and Prussia to take the field in aid of Louis and against his revolutionary subjects.

The question that seemed of paramount importance to them was that of the compensation they should get for their knight-errantry. The Austrian Emperor could not make up his mind which he would prefer—an exchange of Bavaria for Belgium, the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, a slice of Northern France, or territory carved out of Italy; and his indecision lost him them all. The King of Prussia had no doubts—part of Poland for him! It mattered not that he had less than two years before concluded an alliance of mutual defence with Poland. While protesting to England and to Poland that nothing of the kind was going on, he was actually drawing up an agreement with Russia to make a second partition in which Austria should if possible be excluded from a share—surely a very perfect piece of perfidy! He followed Catherine's example in taking up new ground for his action against Poland. He professed to fear that "the principles of Jacobinism are gaining ground in that country, that the spirit of French democracy . . . begins to take root in Poland so that the manœuvres of the Jacobin emissaries are powerfully supported there." He went on to say in the old Hohenzollern style: "The king flatters himself that, with feelings so pacific, he may depend on the goodwill of a nation whose welfare can never be

indifferent to him, and to which he wishes to give real proof of his affection and regard." <sup>1</sup> The new partition treaty was prudently kept secret until the division of the spoils agreed on was accomplished.

The loss and the humiliation of Austria involved in this piece of sharp practice were severe. Francis II was justly incensed at the perfidy of his ally in the French war in securing behind his back an indemnity for Prussia, while Austria was without one, and had but small prospect of getting one, notwithstanding the undertaking that she should have equivalent gains. When remonstrated with, however, Catherine merely said that the matter was settled, probably unjustly on the part of Prussia, and could not be reopened. Austria pleaded and whined, but to no purpose.

The miserable Stanislaw wanted to resign his throne ; but the Empress informed him that he must remain king of Poland until the treaty of dismemberment was signed —until the tool no longer had a use. He obediently pointed out to the Diet that resistance was impossible and signed the treaty,<sup>2</sup> which the Assembly adopted, and which gave Russia a large block of the Republic's land. More resistance was made to that by which Prussia's gains were ratified. The Diet remained obstinately silent for hours. At last it was announced, at the dictation of the Russian ambassador, that silence meant consent. Even then the humiliation of Poland was not complete, for a third treaty<sup>3</sup> gave the small remainder of the country entirely into the power of Russia, and placed it under a military despotism of the most galling kind. Every town was garrisoned, every village pillaged and terrorised ; the slightest attempt at self-defence meant Siberia, and that merely at the command of army officers. In such circumstances it was natural that secret confederations should

<sup>1</sup> Fletcher's *Poland*.

<sup>2</sup> August 17, 1793. Prussia acquired Dantzic and Thorn ; also most of Great Poland with its ancient capitals Gneszno and Posnan, and its sacred city Chenstochowa, which territory was the very heart of Poland. Russia acquired half of Lithuania, the rest of White Russia, a large part of Black Russia, and the whole of the Ukraine west of the Dnieper.

<sup>3</sup> October 5, 1793.

be formed everywhere, and that a rising should be a question only of time and opportunity.

1795.

The Poles put aside all projects of reform and every preoccupation except that of regaining their independence; but the wisest among them determined to wait until Russia was decisively involved in a new war with Turkey, which was then looming on the horizon. Kosciuszko, Kallontaj, Potocki and other leaders retired to Leipzig and held themselves ready to spring at the first favourable opportunity. But a premature outbreak occurred in Poland and forced their hands. Kosciuszko, appointed by the unanimous choice of his compatriots military dictator and head of the civil administration, took charge of Polish affairs. In an effort to "unite the hearts, hands and endeavours of the inhabitants of the whole land" <sup>1</sup> he issued manifestos to every class and condition of men, calling on them to come forward in this supreme crisis and give their all of service and help to their country. To the nation at large he wrote: "Feel at last thy strength; put it wholly forth. Set thy will on being free and independent. By unity and courage thou shalt reach this honoured end. Prepare thy soul for victories and defeats. In both the spirit of true patriotism should maintain its strength and energy. All that remains to me is to praise thy Rising, and to serve thee so long as Heaven permits me to live."

As the result of Kosciuszko's strong lead and untiring devotion the smaller gentry came forth *en masse*; the peasants, the famous "Reapers of Death," were enthusiastic Kosynier (scythemmen) who mowed down Russian troops like grass: but most of the great lords, fearing the consequences of revolutionary ardour among their serfs, hung back. Kosciuszko, however, performed prodigies of leadership and organisation both on the military and administrative sides. Warsaw fell, and he was for a moment master of the whole country.

<sup>1</sup> Manifesto to the army.



Catherine was furious with the insurgents, and declared that "the time has come not only to extinguish to the last spark the fire that has been lighted in our neighbourhood, but to prevent any possible rekindling of the ashes." She called upon Austria and Prussia to help in the subjugation of the Poles, and offered them a share in what remained of the country.

Those two Powers, and Prussia in particular, had meanwhile cooled in their ardour against France, where Louis XVI was now beyond help, while England and Holland had determined to enter the lists against her. On April 19, 1794, Frederick William signed a treaty with Britain, in which he undertook, in return for handsome subsidies paid monthly, to put an army of 62,000 men at her disposal for use against France. His fighting would thus be done at small cost to him! We may in charity suppose that he would not have entered into this engagement had he known in time of the serious nature of the Polish rising, then just beginning. His interests in Poland were immediate and material; in France only prospective and altruistic. However that may be, the policy of subsidising Prussia aroused pretty general suspicion and dislike in England. It was strongly denounced in Parliament by Fox, who said that it was "scarcely possible for the mind of man to conceive conduct more odious (than that of the King of Prussia) . . . a mixture of fraud, perfidy and meanness perfectly new in modern political history," conduct which made it quite improbable, in his opinion, that the court of Berlin would carry out its engagements.

Though Fox's protests were unavailing with a House of Commons easily hypnotised by Pitt, they were justified by the sequel. Ere many weeks had passed Frederick William was, unknown to his allies, negotiating terms of peace with France, was withdrawing his troops, who had not struck a single blow there, from the French frontier, and was concentrating them on the Vistula instead of the Rhine, while until October 25th he continued to pocket British subsidies!

The conduct of Francis II of Austria was almost, if not quite, as indefensible. He was at first strongly determined to prosecute the war with France, to regain the Belgian provinces which had been lost in the previous campaign, and to assert the rights of the Empire in Alsace. But his ministers had become of the opinion that these Western lands were rather a source of weakness than of strength to Austria, and that territorial acquisitions could be made much more easily and profitably in Poland. They seem to have persuaded the Emperor to their view. Thereupon ensued what can only be described as a deliberate piece of treachery: Austrian statesmen preferred to lose the campaign and desert their allies rather than run the risk of losing Poland.<sup>1</sup> At the Battle of Turcoing Austria allowed the troops of her allies—British, Dutch, and Hanoverians, who formed one-third of the whole—to be overwhelmed. The battle was lost while the Austrian soldiers, by the deliberate orders of the Emperor and his staff, looked on and offered no assistance. After the battle the Emperor returned to Vienna to attend to more pressing business, heedless that he had lost Belgium for ever, and that his allies were through his default involved in a disastrous retreat that only ended when next spring (1795) the miserable remnants of the British forces were embarked from Bremen. Once more Poland was “the expiatory victim that saved France” when her situation was “really desperate”<sup>2</sup> by diverting from their purposes these greedy courts, which, now freed from other entanglements, were ready to enrich themselves at her expense.

But Poland had still to be conquered!

Frederick William was first in the field in force. He took Cracow in June and began the siege of Warsaw on July 9th. It is certain that he could have carried the city by assault almost at once, but he preferred a regular siege. The Russian ambassador at his court used his exceptionally great influence over the king to gain this delay, which would allow Suvarov's army to come up;

<sup>1</sup> Von Sybel, *Geschichte der Revolutionszeit*.

<sup>2</sup> Séailles.

for most of Russia's available forces were concentrated in the south in preparation for the expected Turkish war. After two months of futilities the Prussians raised the siege of Warsaw and retreated to Posen. Suvarov was now ready to cross the frontier. He scattered the Poles as he advanced, destroyed the Polish army, took Praga by assault and massacred its citizens indiscriminately. He then offered terms to the capital—personal liberty and security of life and property—and Warsaw capitulated on November 7, 1794. Warsaw was, indeed, in no case to oppose a successful resistance to Russia's greatest general, for on October 9th the Polish army under Kosciuszko, half of whose number was untrained peasants, had been gloriously defeated at Maciejowice, and Kosciuszko himself severely wounded and made prisoner. With his loss the heart was taken out of the Polish forces, which were full of "incurable dissensions." "Father Thaddeus," their liberator, gone, the peasants melted away: perhaps their enthusiasm had always been rather a personal one for their idolised leader than a patriotic one for their country. Kosciuszko and other Polish generals were sent to Russian prisons, and Catherine, triumphant, sat down to the none too easy task of dividing the spoils.

Francis had already sent in a claim not only for a share in the third Partition,<sup>1</sup> but also for territory to compensate him for his exclusion from the second. Frederick William wanted all the land west of the Narew and Vistula, including both capitals, Cracow and Warsaw. Into the ramifications of the negotiations it is not necessary to enter, but it may be noted in passing that the greed of Prussia was not altogether gratified. Russia was the largest gainer, and justly so, as her statesmen claimed; for, said they frankly, "the title of the Empress to her portion of Poland is not the work of a moment, or of a chance, but the creation of thirty years of labour, care and

<sup>1</sup> By its terms Prussia acquired the territory between the Niemen and the Vistula, including Warsaw; Austria gained a triangular piece of land north of Galicia, including Cracow; Russia acquired Courland, and the rest of Black Russia and Lithuania. The last was territory which had never been either Russian or Polish in any real sense.

colossal efforts of every kind." They further boldly affirmed that in comparison with Russia's exertions "Austria and Prussia have received as an unbought gift all the advantages which they have reaped, and will reap, in Poland."

It would, we know, be a mistake to suppose that Catherine was the originator of the policy which had its consummation when the last partition treaty was carried into effect : she was only its inheritor. The Polish provinces she annexed had centuries before belonged to the Empire of Vladimir and Yaroslav. Catherine in effect destroyed Polish domination in Russian lands by success in a war of redemption which, sometimes actively waged, sometimes lying dormant, had lasted since under Ivan III Muscovy became strong enough to attempt it, and which even her success and the political extinction of Poland did not conclude. Catherine's conduct was above-board, her aims known to all men. If certain of the Poles were in ignorance of them, they had only themselves to blame, and they were alone in Europe in their blindness. Whatever may be thought of the morality of Catherine's transactions, their object was not ignoble and their skill was consummate. Her diplomacy was clever in the extreme ; her management of each situation as it arose masterly ; her success complete.

Austria's course was one of hesitations, of changes of policy even more numerous than her changes of sovereigns.<sup>1</sup> The last of these, Francis II, who was young, inexperienced and of little ability, weakly abandoned Austria's traditional policy of friendship with Poland, ignored his father's treaty engagements to that country, and gave way without compunction to territorial greed. Austrian statesmen displayed a treacherous meanness in the pursuit of their objects which was both weak and wicked. It has often been maintained that Austria was less to blame than either of the other despoilers. We cannot subscribe to that view, for, apart from the childish

<sup>1</sup> During this period Austria had four sovereigns—Maria Theresa, Joseph, Leopold and Francis.



shamelessness of her policy, she had no business to be in that *galère* at all. Her absorption of Polish territory was dictated solely by greed and fear, and had nothing to do with lawful claims of any kind. As we have seen, that was Maria Theresa's view, and undoubtedly her instincts were better and wiser than her actions.

Prussia was the darkest villain of the piece, her conduct being without parallel in the story of civilisation except in her own previous records. Underhand dealing, unscrupulous breach of faith, every kind of greed and duplicity, were exhibited by her. We need not go beyond Fox's indictment of her king, quoted above, to learn the opinion of his contemporaries, and public opinion has shown itself not less sensitive to dishonour in these latter days, when the greatest fight in the world's history has been fought to prove the value and sacredness of "scraps of paper" endorsed by the seals of nations. Allowing that the acquisition of West Prussia, half of whose inhabitants were Germans, was a legitimate economic and geographical aim for Prussia whose lands were cut in two by its intervention, there is little room for doubt that a favourable arrangement—both cheap and honourable—could have been come to with a decadent Poland without the use of force or fraud. The province accepted the change of government willingly enough, and it gained in material prosperity by it.<sup>1</sup> Something—even much—may be said for Frederick the Great, though the partition scheme was of his hatching. But for Frederick William no excuses can be made: nothing will cleanse his hands. He promised Poland support and then left her in the lurch; he promised Austria an equal share at the second Partition and did not even think of implementing

<sup>1</sup> Höttsch states that "nowhere was there any opposition to the occupation, the Protestants in particular eagerly welcoming the new rule. The lands annexed by Prussia were indeed in a miserably neglected condition. Frederick set to work with great energy to raise this new part of his kingdom to the level of the rest. . . . The land was taken (from) the Polish nobility, and German burghers and peasants were settled on it; a sympathetic administration of justice was introduced, and national schools were established."

his bargain ; he took money from Great Britain for one object and used it for quite another which he knew was utterly repugnant to her. Words fail to express one's sense of disgust at conduct so repulsive, accompanied as it was by hypocrisy which absolutely stinks in the nostrils.

Poland had been turbulent and extremely ill-governed, an offence to better-ordered states, and her political confusions are sometimes alleged to be a palliation for the guilt of the robber empires : but they are not so : Poland was not permitted by them to put her house in order. Russia and Prussia even went so far as to enter into solemn treaty engagements to maintain the *status quo* in Poland, for it favoured their plans ; and they frustrated her every attempt to alleviate it. This was perhaps the worst part of the whole wretched business. In it also Prussia made a bad third. Austria had little or no part in this meanness, and Russia never pretended friendship to Poland. But Prussia, as has been seen, did so, both formally by treaty and informally by the king's letters.

The action of these Powers was unpardonable when at the later Partitions they attacked a country that was absolutely guiltless of offence. By a dreary road of sacrifice and painful experience, by what were for Poland miracles of self-control and resolution, she had climbed out of her welter of anarchy and ancient abuses only to be beaten down by strong and merciless hands. Poland had shown that she knew where her faults lay, and had quietly set about the work of reconstruction, quietly and successfully gone about her business and interfered with nobody. Her success was her only sin, but it was one unforgivable by empires which looked to profit by her loss.

The other Great Powers, France and Britain, acted with neither heroism nor magnanimity in the Polish affair, but they are at least free from the reproaches of dishonour and baseness that may justly be levelled against the autocracies, offences which they are to-day expiating

in misery and dismemberment, in economic loss and military bankruptcy.

The words "Finis Poloniæ"<sup>1</sup> must not be written here. They do not fit the case, for after the Partition there still remained "a nation that refused to die."

<sup>1</sup> Attributed to Kosciuszko when he fell wounded at the Battle of Maciejowice, but always warmly repudiated by him. "I was not the last Pole. With my death on the battlefield or elsewhere Poland could not, must not, die. . . . We, the devoted soldiers of that country, are mortal: Poland is immortal." (D'Augebert, *Récueil des Traités*.)

## IX

### POLAND IN MODERN TIMES

As the result of the three Partitions at the end of the eighteenth century Poland was effaced from the map of Europe and her territory and population were divided among her autocratic neighbours. But the history of Poland does by no means end with this apparently final catastrophe. In a very real sense modern Poland, born during the throes of dismemberment, only developed under the pressure and pains of the purgatory into which she was thrown by it. All her discordant factions—and with her history in mind one realises that faction, which had hitherto been the bane of her political system, could not at once be eliminated—united in the determination to restore the independence of their country. All, however, were not in accord as to the means to be employed. Some looked to France for support—democratic and revolutionary France which had but lately branded Polish reformers as aristocrats and refused them aid!—others to Russia, where the Empress Catherine had been succeeded by the unstable but clement Paul. His heir was the Grand Duke Alexander, who was known to have humanitarian views: indeed, he avowed his intention to establish the reign of liberalism when he should succeed to the throne, proclaimed himself a republican, and described himself as “a happy accident among his family.”

The party which leaned on France was at first in the ascendant and its headquarters were in Paris, where it was presided over by Kosciuszko,<sup>1</sup> who on taking the

<sup>1</sup> Before he took up this position in 1798 Kosciuszko returned the Tsar's gift of money, and repudiated the oath of allegiance which he declared had been “forced” upon him by “the merciless proceedings of the Tsar's ministers.”



oath of allegiance had been released by Paul with twelve thousand other Polish political prisoners. General Dombrowski formed a Polish Legion which was placed at the disposal of the French Republic and of Napoleon. It never ceased until Waterloo to spend the blood of the best youth of Poland on battlefields which were in no sense hers. But as the poet Krasinski wrote, "Thou didst keep us who were dead living in the field of war. We were not and we were." With their inspiring Marseillaise, "Poland hath not perished yet," on their lips, the Polish Legion always formed the vanguard of attack and the rearguard of retreat. Fifteen thousand of them, sent in 1801 to put down a rebellion in St. Domingo, perished there miserably, almost to a man, of yellow fever; of eighty thousand who accompanied the Grande Armée into Russia in 1812, only three thousand returned; a fresh corps of fifteen thousand, after fighting in the battles of Dresden and Leipzig in 1813, were detailed to cover the retreat of the French army. They were cut off from the main body by the premature destruction of a bridge over the river Elster, and many of them, including their general, Prince Joseph Poniatowski, a Marshal of France, were drowned. The remnant that survived that disaster still followed the fortunes of Napoleon until their final eclipse at Waterloo.

In their credulous, buoyant, unbusinesslike way, the Poles measured the power and the goodwill of Napoleon by their own hopes and desires. Their disappointment when, after the humiliation of Prussia at Jena and the occupation of Berlin, only the creation of the Duchy of Warsaw under the house of Saxony rewarded them for their faithful services, taught them nothing. They continued to take the Emperor's guarded lip-service to Poland's cause at too high a valuation, and they paid no heed to the warnings of their greatest leader. From the first Napoleon fed the Poles with fair words and vague aspirations; he secured their loyal help by holding out to them the prospect of restoration; but to him Poland was only a piece on the political chess-board, a splendid

recruiting-ground for his armies. He formed the Grand Duchy of Warsaw out of Prussian Poland (exclusive of West Prussia) and after Wagram added the greater part of Galicia to it. He gave it a constitution liberal in theory, and all the ministers were of Polish nationality. But the Chambers had neither initiative nor right of discussion in legislative matters: their main business was to vote subsidies and provide troops for France. The Poles of the Duchy gained something doubtless, even much. Serfage was abolished there; equality of status before the law and complete religious toleration were enforced; above all, the Code Napoléon superseded the antiquated and chaotic Polish legal system, and has remained in force in the greater part of Congress Poland ever since. But the Grand Duchy of Warsaw was no restoration of a free and united Poland: it was rather a fresh partition in which Saxony received a share: by it the hopes of the Poles, who had done so much for France, were callously disappointed.

Kosciuszko, who had never favoured the Napoleonic cult, but had considered that the benefits of French friendship were much overrated by his countrymen, appealed on the downfall of the Empire in 1814 to the Emperor Alexander for an amnesty, better treatment of the working population of misguided Poland, and a liberal constitution under his sceptre. He was answered by a gracious letter granting the boons he craved. "Your dearest wishes shall be accomplished," wrote the Tsar. "With the aid of the Almighty I hope to bring about the resurrection of the valiant and admirable nation to which you belong. I have taken upon myself this solemn obligation. . . . How satisfactory it would be to me, General, to see you my helpmate in the accomplishment of these salutary labours."

Thus it appeared that Alexander had the will to do justice to Poland, and his position augured well for his power to carry out his plans. He was in complete possession of Poland and of Saxony also, his title that of conquest, indisputable: the country was his, its fate

what he willed. "I have conquered the Duchy (of Warsaw); I have 480,000 men to guard it," he said. "It is mine." Yet the Poles had good reason to fear the vengeance of Russia, now that they were at her mercy: had they not joyfully joined in the invasion of her territory by the Grande Armée? Russians, moreover, looked on them as rebels, and declared that even as soldiers their conduct had not been above reproach, for they had been unscrupulous raiders and plunderers. At that time, however, Alexander's liberal idealism was still in the ascendant, and caused him to overlook all the accusations which could be brought against a people whose misfortunes far outweighed them. He considered himself to have been the instrument of Heaven in freeing Europe from the Napoleonic régime; neither selfishness nor revengeful passion should mar his high magnanimity; he was determined that his long-cherished plans for Poland should prevail. He told a deputation from Lithuania: "All is forgotten and pardoned: they must not have any doubt of the interest I feel for them and the desire I have to see them happy and content." And he certainly did his best to fulfil the assurances thus solemnly given. At the Congress of Vienna the Poles had for their spokesman the Emperor of all the Russians, who was by far the greatest figure there, and his proposals were more liberal than any others.

His plan was that the country as constituted before the second Partition should be restored and have Lithuania added to it, and that it should be an autonomous kingdom under the Russian sceptre. To Austria he offered no compensation for loss of territory, but he proposed to give Saxony to Prussia in return for surrendered Polish provinces. This plan pleased nobody, and least of all Alexander's own subjects, who were doubly annoyed at a loss of territory and at a grant of more liberal government to rebel Poles than they themselves enjoyed. After much debate, many intrigues and long delay, Alexander presented the indignant Congress with a *fait accompli*, for he ordered his general, Prince Repnin, to deliver

Saxony to Prussia, and then to have him (Alexander) proclaimed king at Warsaw with the promise of a liberal constitution. This move nearly plunged Europe into a new war, but ultimately the Emperor was induced to consent to a compromise. Prussia got Posen, Dantzic, Thorn and part of Saxony; Galicia was restored to Austria (with the exception of Cracow and its surrounding district, which was created an independent republic under the protection of the three Empires), while the Duchy and some small additions were constituted the "Congress Kingdom" with the Tsar as king.

Thus was Poland partitioned for the fifth time by the representatives of all the Great Powers of Europe, which therefore became responsible for her dismemberment, took upon themselves partnership in whatever guilt the transaction involved, and became equally bound, when the tide of morality and justice should turn, to undo it.

Great Britain at least had qualms of conscience and presentiments of evil. Lord Castlereagh, her representative at the Congress, pointed out that Alexander's plans for the kingdom would prove unworkable. The Poles, he said, should either be given their freedom and restored to complete independence, or they should be incorporated with the lands to which they were assigned on the same terms as their other inhabitants. Only discontent would result from the Emperor's system, which would certainly "perish at the hands of his successor." At the same time he reassured Parliament by stating that "the Poles would now be governed as Poles." The words of the treaty itself, however, gave but slight grounds for optimism in that matter. They were: "The Poles who are respectively subjects of Russia, Austria and Prussia shall obtain a Representative Constitution regulated according to the degree of political consideration that each government to which they belong shall judge expedient and proper to give them." Considering the previous record of the partitioning Powers, this looks perilously like handing over the lamb to the tender mercies of the wolves!

How were Castlereagh's contradictory prophecies ful-



filled, and to what degree did the Powers honour the bond entered into at Vienna?

Austria began ill by treating her Polish subjects as wholly without rights, by alternately neglecting, repressing and exploiting them; but after 1861 she repented and, as we shall see, became the most liberal of the three.

The King of Prussia issued a proclamation to his restored Polish subjects, whose promises were never directly rescinded. In it he assured them of the same treatment under the same constitution as his "faithful subjects." Their personal rights, property, religion and language were guaranteed, and they were promised a share of all public offices in the kingdom. For about fifteen years the compact thus entered into was in the main observed, but after the Polish rising in 1830 Prussia fell from grace and became to Poles the most odious of the three.

The Emperor Alexander meant well in his dilettante and superficial way, and made a good beginning. "The kingdom of Poland will be united to Russia by the bond of its own constitution," he said. "I have at least endeavoured . . . to obtain for (Poles) everywhere the peaceful enjoyment of their nationality." As a matter of fact the new constitution of the kingdom was framed with a scrupulous regard for Polish feelings and usages. The Diet consisted of two Chambers very nearly on the lines of the old Polish Senate and Izba. It was to sit for thirty days every two years and had the rights of imposing taxation and of discussing and rejecting proposed laws, though not of introducing them. Poles only were to be employed in administrative offices, and personal freedom and liberty of the Press were granted. Russia retained the conduct of foreign affairs in her own hands, but not ungenerously took over the Polish debt and (for the first two years) the cost of the army. This constitution was, as of old, purely aristocratic, and fell short of modern Polish ideals. The urban franchise was restricted and the peasants were ignored; in the provinces the nobles alone had any civil or judicial functions. It was confidently expected, however, that Alexander would

appoint as Viceroy his lifelong friend, Prince Adam Czartoryski, who had always been his guide in matters Polish, and under whom development and progress would have been assured. Instead, one General Zagłonzek, old and completely without weight socially or politically, was appointed. This was a blunder. It alienated the great nobles, who sent the Viceroy and his court to Coventry, and it prejudiced the nation against the new régime from the start.

Alexander regarded the whole arrangement as one of those experiments in liberalism of which he was fond, but the outcome of which always frightened him into reaction. When in 1818 he opened the first Diet, he stated his intention of granting liberal constitutions to all the countries he ruled, and warned the Poles that much depended on their conduct. "The result of your labours will teach me whether . . . I shall be able to extend what I have already done for you."

The great obstacle to the success of Alexander's plans was the Grand Duke Constantine, who was Polish Commander-in-Chief and responsible to the Emperor alone. He was reactionary and autocratic—innocent of the least understanding of the meaning of constitutional government. He arrested and imprisoned any member of the Diet who opposed or even criticised the government. Violation of the constitution began in 1819 by the establishment of a censorship of the Press. Spies multiplied in so favourable an atmosphere: soon a careless word meant arrest and personal liberty became merely a dream of the past. The Diet was summoned less often than was legal; there were only four sessions altogether between 1815 and 1830. Constantine even treated the officers of his cherished Polish army, that was too precious to be allowed to see active service along with the Russian army, with a mixture of brutality and indignity that drove some of them to suicide.

A second unfortunate influence in Polish affairs was that exercised by the Imperial Commissioners in charge of Russian interests in the country, and by one of their

number in particular. This infamous man, Novosiltseff, whom the Poles named "the evil spirit" of the Congress Kingdom, kept the Emperor supplied with reports malevolent towards Poland and calculated to strengthen the reactionary spirit which was gradually petrifying Alexander. Novosiltseff sought occasions to harm Poland. Through his intervention, for instance, a number of students at Wilno, who were members of societies whose aims were moral and philanthropic, not political, were imprisoned, and even in some cases tortured, and their societies dissolved. Many of these young men, generous and patriotic, with no disloyal purposes, among them the national poet Mickiewicz, were sent into exile in far-off Russia and Siberia, and few of them saw their homes again. The liberties granted by Alexander were not formally revoked, but were simply trampled upon by the irresponsible and doubtfully-sane Constantine and his advisers, and the country was governed by military rule as a conquered province with no political rights at all. After Alexander's death in 1825 it was just a matter of time for even a professed observance of treaty obligations to fail, for Nicholas I regarded them with a jealous and unfavourable eye.

It was natural that Russia should proceed cautiously and should retain in her own hands a decisive influence in Poland, whose people were famous for their turbulence and indiscipline. But nevertheless the conduct of her Government in arbitrarily suppressing liberties which it had itself granted was indefensible. Whatever our opinion may be as to the faults of the former Polish system, however severely we may think it right to censure the imprudent, reckless, even venal, conduct of the Poles themselves, there cannot be two opinions as to the justice of their case against Russia at this time. Their former internal government had been their own affair, and they had not attempted to impose their ideas on others: but their independence had been taken from them because in the estimation of neighbouring Powers they abused it. All the more incumbent was it on those who assumed the

duties of judges and executioners in the case to see that the régime they substituted for the old one was, if not faultless, at least just and in conformity with engagements solemnly undertaken in the council-chamber of Europe. Instead of that, misgovernment grew in ever-increasing ratio, and discontent grew at least equally fast. In Austrian Poland disaffection did not become extensive enough to be dangerous, though there for years no attempt was made to carry out the provisions of the Treaty of Vienna. In Prussia the Polish provinces were autonomous and so far well treated. In neither of those districts did the Poles think it worth while to risk a revolt. Only in the Congress Kingdom were oppression and misrule, arbitrary imposition of taxation and arbitrary suppression of free speech carried to such lengths that at last a not very patient people was goaded into rebellion.

And yet one imagines that it should have been easy to win the confidence and loyalty of the Poles. The benefits of just and stable institutions should have appealed to them, for they had not been well governed or prosperous in the recent past. They had shown in the eighteen years between the first and second Partitions that they were capable of great things when not exposed to political turmoil, and they were given to high and enthusiastic idealism. They had bled and died on a score of battle-fields for Napoleon, attracted by his personality and led by the slightest of chains. Alexander had an attractive personality too. The Finns, to whom also he had given a free constitution, worshipped him—but in their case the constitution was not violated! The task of Russia, we repeat, should not have been difficult, given goodwill and good faith on both sides. But difficult or not, it was clearly Russia's duty to govern the Poles decently, and to see to it that free institutions once granted were maintained, at least until they were unmistakably forfeited by misconduct. But Russia never gave the Poles a chance to prove themselves good subjects.

When the outbreak of 1830 occurred the Poles appealed to Europe, and argued that the Treaty of Vienna had



been set aside by Russia, and that therefore the independence they had lost under it should be restored to them. The response was not very encouraging. Austria remained openly neutral, but secretly helped Russia; Prussia favoured Russia without disguise; France and Britain answered the Polish manifesto by protesting—too late—to the Russian Government against the infractions of the treaty. Nicholas was deeply offended. He declared that the affair was one of domestic politics, and claimed that the Poles by their insurrection had broken the treaty, which was therefore no longer binding. He made no apology for the severities which had driven them to extremities, or for the violations of the treaty perpetrated by the agents of his Government. Nicholas had from the first disliked the Polish constitution and been contemptuous of the Poles as a people. He was by nature and upbringing an autocrat of the first water, a militarist of the most rigid stamp. But he was a conscientious man who believed that a ruler has duties as well as rights, and that he must use his power for the best—as he himself saw it. He was also a man of his word, and one is forced to conclude that the practices of his agents in Poland, which were in direct contravention of his coronation oath and his manifesto<sup>1</sup> to Poland, were in large measure unknown to him or coloured for his inspection. However that may be, Nicholas allowed all the ruthlessness and the military severity of his iron disposition free rein when the rebellion was suppressed and Poland at his mercy.

An insurrection that was “a war of the weak against the mighty . . . of men mindful that they have had great ancestors,”<sup>2</sup> and who were therefore unable tamely to submit to degradation and injustice, was quenched in torrents of blood, and the most thorough precautions were taken against its recurrence. “Everywhere, in the greatest to the smallest things, all that was Polish was destroyed,”

<sup>1</sup> In his manifesto Nicholas used these phrases: “The institutions which he (Alexander) gave you will remain unchanged. I promise and swear before God that I will maintain the Act of Constitution and will make every effort to ensure it being maintained.”

<sup>2</sup> Krasinski, letter to his father, 1831.

says Count Tarnowski.<sup>1</sup> The constitution was annulled, the Diet abolished, the country thenceforth ruled from St. Petersburg. The Russian language was prescribed in church and school; education<sup>2</sup> ceased to be compulsory as the Poles had made it; the army was merged in the Russian army; the Press was censored; the contents of library and museum were removed to the Russian capitals; the very population was deported, 45,000 families being removed to the Caucasus, and fatherless boys sent away from their mothers to Russian military schools.<sup>3</sup> Thousands were exiled and their property confiscated, Russians only being allowed to purchase lands so alienated. Paskievitch, the ruthless conqueror of Warsaw, was made Viceroy, and for nearly a quarter of a century the work of crushing the Polish nation was uninterruptedly carried on.

But "it is not said in God's thought that a people must perish until the moment when that people itself accepts death," wrote Krasinski in 1831.<sup>4</sup> "And we will never accept it, because from the death of so many victims has sprung forth a new moral life that will for long animate my country." That saying proved to be true. Under the régime of terror and severity of the next twenty years Poland organised herself for commerce and industry, and so successfully that her budgets, framed by Count Xavier Lubecki, began to show surpluses. Her efforts never flagged. Her watchwords became (for the time) "peaceful progress and political compromise." She even began to exploit new markets in Russia itself, and the change from the inertia of the eighteenth century was in every way most marked. Then it was also that the romantic movement in literature burst into full flower and gave to the world that splendid series of poems and

<sup>1</sup> President of the Academy of Sciences, Cracow.

<sup>2</sup> Elementary schools increased in number from 140 to 634 during the Duchy period. The University of Warsaw was established in 1816, and numerous technical and other schools were built by the Poles.

<sup>3</sup> In some cases the Government did not stop there. Krasinski's friend, Soltan, was deprived of all his children, the three boys being sent to military schools, the two girls to convents.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to his friend, Henry Reeve.

dramas which have made Poland's name famous, but which could only by stealth be read within her borders. The very hardships and sufferings of the time called forth manifestations of the irrepressible vitality of the nation on both the spiritual and the material sides.

Before the revolt of 1830 the Poles had with them the judgment and sympathy of liberal Russians, who advocated decentralisation and autonomy for the subject races, including the Poles, and all the more earnestly as that seemed to them the best means of gaining a constitution for Russia herself. The Decembrist rising at the accession of Nicholas I, in which Poles were understood to be implicated, and the rebellion of 1830, alienated Russian opinion. As their views evolved, Pan-Slavism rather than Westernisation, became their ideal. The more conservative regarded the Muscovite state as the body into which the other Slav races should be incorporated and which would save the world by its faith, its true democratic practices preserved among the peasants in their communes, and its strong monarchy—save it from the political and class struggles and the jarring creeds of Western Europe. Catholic Poland to them was an irritating excrescence in a Slav world which should be exclusively Orthodox. They found Russia irksomely saddled with a state which stood for constitutionalism in politics and heresy in religion—principles most hateful to the bureaucracy and to the conservative nationalists of Russia.

The differences between the ideals of the two nations, when fanatically held, were apparently fundamental, and were felt by the Poles as much as by the Slavophiles. For the Poles the Pan-Slav ideal would involve loss of nationality and merging in Russia, and it did not appeal to them at all, though with the opportunism of weakness they dallied with it for a time. Their true attitude was unmistakably revealed in 1830, when the deposition of the Emperor was proclaimed and Alexander's friend, Prince Adam Czartoryski, placed himself at the head of the Polish Provisional Government. This shocked loyal Russians; but as time went on, and the iron rule of Nicholas

gripped Russian life ever harder and crushed its every manifestation, sympathy with the Poles revived, and the Marquis Wielopolski won some important concessions for them, especially in the spheres of religion and education of which he became the head.

In 1855 Alexander II, The Liberator, became Emperor, and it was his intention to give the Poles some measure of autonomy again, though he warned them against indulging in "dreams." But his promises came too late. The country was nearing the frenzy of discontent which broke into open revolt when two thousand young men, who were supposed to be disaffected, were seized in their beds and sent off as conscripts to depots far in the extremities of Russia. There was now no Polish army, and the revolt of 1863 was hopeless from the first. But the task of pacification was not easy, for Polish guerilla bands when attacked melted away to reassemble elsewhere, and sporadic fighting went on all over the country. The zealots, who were carrying on a secret national government at Warsaw, kept the flames alive by every possible means, even by the assassination of those who did not obey their orders. For a year terror reigned in Poland, terror of the revolutionaries and terror of the Russians, who are said to have vied with one another in barbarity: ambuscades, massacres and reprisals were the order of the day. Prussia had been alarmed by claims publicly made by Poles to Posen, and even to West Prussia and Pomerania, and her Government placed a cordon of troops along the frontier, which helped Russia by stopping fugitives and preventing Prussian Poles from joining in the revolt. Attempts were made by Napoleon III to form an Alliance among the Western Powers in aid of Poland, but nothing came of it. The Poles, after protests and threats, were left to their fate, which was only aggravated by ineffectual intervention. For "on the ruin of the Polish Revolution rose the work of Bismarck and the system of russification in the Empire of the Tsars."<sup>1</sup>

The country was again placed under military govern-

<sup>1</sup> Kosmian.



ment: all idea of autonomy was abandoned and all concessions withdrawn. Determined efforts were made to stamp out Poland's nationality, its language and its religion. The censorship prohibited the publication of everything of vital interest, and caused prevarication and innuendo to become intellectual habits, open truth and plain speaking being barred. By exile and imprisonment Poland was deprived of the services of the best men of two or more generations. By the justice—so-called—of Administrative Procedure, which always hung like a Damocles' sword above their heads, the people were kept in a state of nervous tension. No one knew when he might be arrested and disappear without trace. He might return—probably still in ignorance of his offence, possibly reduced almost to idiocy by his sufferings—or he might not; but there was no appeal, no escape for a patriotic Pole except by duplicity or bribery. The younger generation, under obligation to learn Russian and to use it, approaching their own language in the schools as a foreign one and their history from their enemies' viewpoint, as Poles denied entrance to the civil service or the army except in the lowest ranks, were in imminent danger of being denationalised. They were pressed into unfamiliar and uncongenial paths of trade, industry and farming, and a new type of working Pole—a producer—has evolved within the last sixty years, which is some offset to the horrible conditions which produced it.

Under Milyutin a policy was adopted whose object was the conciliation of the peasants. It was hoped to gain them for Russia, and to destroy the upper classes who were hopelessly opposed to her. This policy gave the fee-simple of the land to the peasants with right of access to the landowners' forests and waste lands, while compensation, paid in Treasury bonds, was provided for "loyal" owners only. Local government, from which the gentry were excluded, was set up in the villages. The result of this legislation was to stereotype class divisions and to set up a very large body of small proprietors—nearly one and a quarter millions of them—with, as the

Government hoped, interests antagonistic to those of other classes. Milyutin also declared war on the Polish Church, confiscating its lands, dissolving many of its monasteries, turning the parish priests into paid Government officials, and abolishing the concordat with Rome whereby the Uniat Church had been instituted. The Holy Synod, under the reactionary Pobedonostsef, set itself to force the Uniats into Orthodoxy. Though this in practice meant little more than "the deposition of Latin saints in favour of Greek," large numbers left the Church altogether rather than submit, and when in 1905 religious liberty was restored, most of those who had under pressure left the Uniat Church promptly returned to it. The attempted conversion of the peasants into good Russians, alluded to above, had no greater success. The schools were neglected and deserted, their influence in introducing Russian culture nil. Clandestine instruction in Polish was given to the peasants, and the object of the National League which was formed for the purpose was political. It aimed at keeping nationalism alive among the people, and so successfully that its leader, M. Dmowski, averred "they were the army of the national movement" during the Russian revolutionary crisis in 1905. At the elections to the first Duma in 1906 a solid body of thirty-six National Democrats was returned from Poland, which formed a separate party whose vote was often a casting one.

Meanwhile, industrialism and prosperity founded upon it had been growing apace in Poland. Her leaders dropped—until more favourable conditions should arise—the policy of physical force, which would cut them off from their new markets and throw them back into the poverty from which they were emerging under the Russian flag and behind its customs barriers. They favoured rather the idea of autonomy within the Empire. Their position was strengthened when, after the events of 1866 and 1870,<sup>1</sup> it began to be perceived that Germany, not Russia, was the enemy. This Neo-Slav movement had some

<sup>1</sup> The German attacks on Denmark and on France.

sympathisers among the Galician Poles, and it was supported by the Russian Cadet and Octobrist<sup>1</sup> parties. In his manifesto, issued shortly after the opening of the Great War, the Grand Duke Nicholas may be said to have expressed the aims of this movement, and certainly raised expectations of their fulfilment. But his action was never really endorsed by the Government, and its policy in Galicia, when in 1914 the Russian army victoriously entered it, showed its real mind. Galicia was treated as a conquered province and governed by Russian officials of the worst class, whose one idea seemed to be its immediate russification, and this notwithstanding that the province had enjoyed self-government and political freedom for over fifty years.

Russia, as all men know, lost Congress Poland in 1915, and by the irony of events it fell to Germany to grant her a constitution, albeit not a very liberal one. Finally, in 1918 Poland took her destinies once more into her own hands and began to mould them in accordance with her own ideals—for the Armistice and the Treaty of Versailles restored her to freedom and independence, and reunited her severed members.

We must now turn to the history of those portions of Poland given to Austria and Prussia under the Treaty of Vienna, and tell, very shortly, how it fared with them.

As has been already indicated, for nearly fifty years Austria cynically flouted her obligations under the treaty. Metternich aimed at crushing out every evidence of Polish nationality. The administration was carried on by Austrians or Chechs; the language was proscribed; public works of every kind were ruinously neglected; taxation was imposed so heavy that Galicia, always backward, became more and more depressed every year. Then in 1846 came the outbreak, subtly engineered by the Government, of the peasants against their landlords,

<sup>1</sup> Cadets = Constitutional Democrats. Octobrists were those who made the promised concessions of the Emperor's manifesto of October 30, 1905, their goal.

the severest single blow sustained by Polish patriots because one dealt them by their own people. The peasantry was easily duped, and for three days assassination and arson raged. In the same year, partly at least on account of a ruse of the Government, Cracow lost its independence. At that time unrest was in the air, and a Polish rising was being planned in Paris and canvassed among Poles everywhere. Unexpectedly the Austrian garrison was removed from Cracow, and the tempting opportunity was seized. Insurgent bands entered and called on the citizens to rise. Immediately the Austrian troops returned and suppressed the incipient revolt. Shortly afterwards the town, whose neutrality had been compromised, was annexed to Austrian Galicia by consent of the other protecting Powers. Thus the Poles lost their sole free *pied-à-terre* in the world.

But this loss was soon followed by the Emperor Francis Joseph's grant of self-government, which more than made up for it. Not only did the Poles have a Diet of their own at Lemberg in full charge of education and other services, but Polish and Ruthenian deputies in proportion to the population were admitted to the Reichsrath, and eminent Poles were enabled to rise high in the Imperial service. In the Reichsrath the Poles numbered fifty-seven, and formed the largest, best organised and most influential group. They held the balance, and used their position skilfully to gain concessions from the Government, to which, amid so many conflicting nationalities and interests, their support was invaluable. The Polish Club, as the party was called, was in this way able to realise most of its aims one by one. The Viceroy, Count Goluchowski, could even openly assert in the Polish Diet that Galicia was "part of Poland (with) a future, misty it is true, but not impossible."

The result of these liberties and concessions was that Austrian Poles were more loyal to their Government and more contented than either of the other divisions of their race. When the Great War broke out a Polish Legion was at once formed by the Socialist leader Pilsudski,



which invaded Russia. Not that the Poles of Galicia greatly loved their suzerain, but that they greatly feared Russia, and, as the result showed, with reason. In spite of the assurances of the manifesto of the Grand Duke Nicholas, which promised that Poland should be "reborn, free in faith, in language, in self-government," Russia's one thought, when Galicia lay at her mercy in consequence of the fall of Lemberg and the rout of the Austrian troops in the four great battles <sup>1</sup> and numerous minor engagements of the 1914 campaign, seemed to be to suppress Galician liberties and administer the province according to the most hardened bureaucratic methods.

The fate and the treatment of the Polish provinces assigned to Prussia was different from that of the other divisions of the race outlined above, and at first, as has been indicated, it was more favourable. At the outset Posen was developed commercially and industrially with Prussian thoroughness, but with regard to Polish susceptibilities, and in local government much was left to the nobles, who retained their Seigniorial rights. In 1823 the peasants' tenures were converted into freehold, and very soon there were thousands of peasant proprietors whose former lords were "compensated" by being allowed to retain one-third of their lands in their own hands! These peasants, previously indifferent to national ideals, were won in church and school for Polish nationalism, and in 1830 twelve thousand Poles of Posen took part in the rising in the Kingdom. This proved from the Government standpoint that the policy of "consideration and concession" had been a failure. It was withdrawn, and a policy of repression and germanisation was adopted which, albeit prosecuted from time to time with varying degrees of intensity, was never abandoned.

Though during the universal unrest towards the end of the "forties" there was no actual rising in Posen, "the Prussian wolf raged" fiercely there. In consequence of the sympathy manifested with the oppressed Poles by the German Parliaments, the Polish provinces were in

<sup>1</sup> Lemberg, Opole, Tomasov and Rava Russka.

1851 withdrawn from the German Confederation and reincorporated with Prussia, in whose Diet, however, they were represented and were able to press their views. During the years that followed Polish national propaganda was carried on until, in Bismarck's words, it was "successfully undermining the foundations of the Prussian State." The educational and economic policy of Prussia had transformed the serfs into prosperous small-holders and urban workers, educated and lifted out of their former degraded condition. They had ungratefully become, not good Germans, but a Polish middle-class with a strong national feeling totally opposed to Prussia. Prince Bismarck attributed this to the influence of the priests, and his *Kulturkampf*, or war on Catholicism, begun in 1870, bore doubly hard on the Poles, as Poles and as Catholics, and only served to add religious ardour to political feeling.

Government uneasiness was increased by the fact that not only was the Polish population growing fast in Posen, but it was overflowing the borders into Silesia and all the eastern provinces, and penetrating even into distant Westphalia. These immigrants had come to stay, and were in addition to the many thousand Polish seasonal labourers who lived in the German hamlets all summer and helped to polonise their inhabitants. Frightened politicians believed that this Slavic flood threatened to swamp the nationality of the German people. It seemed to them necessary "to take the offensive in order to rescue German nationality in the East. . . . No concern for the Polish people must hinder us from doing all we can to maintain and strengthen the German nationality in the former Polish provinces. . . . What God has granted us we must and will retain." The Poles had forfeited their right to independence because they were "incapable of creating a strong government on the basis of law and order ; yet none may shut their eyes to the tragic fate of this gifted and brave people"—a truly Prussian touch ! " We must respect the Poles and sympathise with the loyalty with which they cling to their nationality. . . . We must try to bring it to pass that by means of the German

language they will learn to understand the German spirit.”<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, in 1873 an administrative order was promulgated making the use of German compulsory in all schools, except in religious instruction, and two years later the use of the Polish language in public was prohibited.

From another standpoint also the germanisation of Poland appeared necessary. In view of a “forthcoming war” the Government desired to have “the best possible conditions,” and the colonisation of an already sufficiently populated province was resolved on. By a law passed in 1885 all Poles not born in Posen were ordered to leave it at forty-eight hours’ notice. Some forty thousand persons were thus ruined and expelled from the country where most of them had lived since childhood. Friendless, homeless, bankrupt, they wandered forth—savings, businesses, property, all left behind and lost. Steps were immediately taken to fill the gaps thus made. By the Colonisation Bill a Royal Commission was appointed to purchase Polish lands and convert them into German settlements. But a condition imposed was that such settlers must be husbands of German wives, for, said Bismarck, a Polish wife “makes her husband a Polish patriot in the twinkling of an eye”! Eventually the money voted for colonisation amounted to a thousand million marks. But the Poles, who made financial arrangements for the purpose, bought up land so alienated when, as often happened, its German occupants returned to their own country, and the policy was an expensive failure. But presently the Government countered the efforts of the Poles by reserving to itself the right of pre-emption, and properties once sold to the Commission were lost to the Poles for ever. In 1907 a Pole was forbidden to build on his land without permission, and the strange sight was seen of families living in tents and caravans on land they had acquired, where of set purpose no home was allowed them. In the next year the coping-stone was placed on the edifice by the Expropriation Bill, actually enforced in 1912, which empowered the

<sup>1</sup> Prince von Bülow.

Commissioners forcibly to take possession of what land they chose, and (after compensation calculated by themselves) to expel its owners.

About this time, too (1905), religious instruction in schools was ordered to be given in German to Polish children as well as others, and a scandalised world witnessed the spectacle of a children's strike, and of the coercion of recalcitrant babies whipped till the blood flowed because they would not say their prayers in another tongue than that they had learned at their mothers' knees ! No wonder that it was necessary to grant German schoolmasters in Posen extra pay, and German settlers in general special advantages. But, in spite of the repeated and costly efforts of the Government, the Polish element more than held its own ; it grew continually in strength and prosperity. In the vital and age-long duel between *Deutschtum* and *Polentum*, never carried on with greater intensity and determination than in the last half-century, the victory, at once brilliant and solid, emphatically was not to the strong.<sup>1</sup>

Then came the Great War, that terrible explosion so long anticipated by all Poles with eagerness, yet with fear and trembling ; for would they not have to fight in the conscript armies of both sides ? The Congress Kingdom, moreover, the greater part of Poland, would surely, as of old, be the theatre of war. No Pole ever believed that Russia intended to defend his country against a German advance. They believed that she would merely try to hinder and delay that advance, and would carry out the policy of evacuation and retirement before the enemy which she had practised so successfully in 1812. And they were not far wrong. But even before the great strategical retreat of the Grand Duke Nicholas in 1915 Poland had had full measure, pressed down and running

<sup>1</sup> Von Bülow, writing in 1916, frankly admits this. He says : " Our policy in the Eastern Marches has led to no palpable results, since after nearly twenty years of the policy of colonisation there is no appreciable change in the percentage of Germans and Poles in the Eastern Marches. As an increase in the percentage of Germans was what Bismarck aimed at, our policy, and in particular the work of colonisation, must be considered to have failed."



over, of the horrors of war. Misery grew from week to week as the German armies advanced towards the Vistula, only to reel back again before the Russian thrust. When in early winter, 1914, von Hindenburg determined on a change of tactics and evacuated Poland, he systematically reduced the country to a desert. Roads, bridges, water-works, stations, railway tracks, telegraph lines—all were destroyed. Villages were burned and their luckless inhabitants had to find refuge in dens and caves of the earth, in disused trenches and derelict dug-outs. All factories were ruined by the requisition of their belting and copper fittings. Industry and trade, so patiently built up during many decades, ceased ; famine and disease appeared everywhere. Nor did the tides of battle cease to flow. They continued to surge to and fro, sweeping with them drifting fugitives whose all had gone and who had no way of escape. The disasters of Poland were greater than those of Belgium in proportion as the country was larger and more completely ravaged. Nay, more : Belgium, or the greater part of it, was occupied, lived in and kept habitable by the Germans, however galling or severe their yoke might be. Poland was turned into a vast battlefield and many times fought over. Later it was exploited as a recruiting-ground for soldiers and labourers to help the cause of Germany, with which they had no scintilla of sympathy.

It is unnecessary to detail the German arrangements for the autonomous state set up in Poland in 1916. It was neither a large nor an independent one ; was, in fact, little more than the Duchy of Warsaw over again. Lithuania, by the name of Ober-Ost, was erected into a separate state under the suzerainty of Germany. West Galicia remained an Austrian province, while East Galicia was to be united with some part of Little Russia into a new Ukrainian state. Actually by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk the Polish districts of Chelm and Podlasia were handed over to Ukraina. This intensely disappointed the Poles, whose position was still far from assured. In the Congress Kingdom opinion was fractionally divided. There were

in 1917 no fewer than seventeen political parties, of whom eleven favoured the Government, which was in essence German—not because they were pro-German, but because they thought it best meanwhile to maintain relations with their powerful masters, who, however, were not less hated and feared than they had ever been. The true rallying point for the Poles in 1918 was in Paris, where M. Dmowski presided over the National Council.

After the breakdown of the German offensive in the West in 1918, and the destruction for ever of her military power by the splendid victories of Foch, Haig and Diaz, all the new nationalities in the simmering chaldron of Eastern Europe were left in the air to fend for themselves, and one must admire the promptitude and calm with which the Poles set about the work of reconstruction. Perfect order reigned. At Warsaw a few hundred improvised soldiers disarmed a German garrison twenty thousand strong and took over its duties. There was not a single affray in the streets ; not a shop was looted ; and conditions equally good were the rule in other cities. There was no sign of an annihilating social revolution such as had been feared : “ Liberty at once became with us Poles the synonym of order—our own Polish order.”<sup>1</sup>

In the political sphere Austrian Poland, with its own Diet and universal suffrage, was able to act at once. The Assembly met on October 28th, and within a month had taken Lemberg from the Ukraine and set up a Governing Committee for the province, pending its reunion with the Kingdom. The Austrian Poles refused to recognise the Government first set up in the Kingdom because it was Socialist in complexion, but they had hopes that that obstacle to reunion would not prove to be permanent, and they were right.

In Prussian Poland also elections were soon held, and a Diet met at Posen on December 3rd. It authorised the National Committee in Paris to be its representative abroad, and set to work on the solution of pressing internal problems. But the Germans were not inclined to let

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ladislas Wroblewski, Polish Minister to Great Britain.

Posen go. They sent an army with which the Poles maintained a stout fight until an Allied Commission appeared to regulate the boundaries.

In the Kingdom a false start was at first made. The Regency of Three, which had been set up by the Central Powers, at once proclaimed the unity and independence of Poland, but it had not the support of the chief Nationalist groups. It tried to work with a Socialist Government headed by Marshal Pilsudski, who was released from a German prison at the Armistice and made Polish Commander-in-Chief. His Government fell at the General Election held in all the Polands in January, 1919, when the Nationalist parties gained a great and decisive victory. The new Sejm is a democratic assembly in which all classes are represented, though peasant delegates preponderate. The pressure of daily problems prevented, until March 17, 1921, the passing of any constitution, and the Sejm was all-powerful, bound neither by law nor by tradition. A high level of patriotism and of ability has been shown, however, and one is glad to believe that a successful career lies before the Polish legislature and Republic once initial troubles, which it is true are exceptionally baffling, have been overcome.

In a few months, then, the new state had risen firmly to its feet, its three political entities merged into one, its Diet and Executive in working order. That, among a people whose political tendency has always been disruptive, was surely something of a feat. Indeed, we may claim that it showed a practical organising ability truly remarkable in the circumstances. And everything was against its accomplishment. There were neither administrators with experience on a national scale, nor a competent civil service. There were three different social systems, three clashing codes of law. In the Kingdom no Pole of this generation had ever been a judge or occupied any responsible post. The country was devastated by war, ravaged by famine and disease, and verging on bankruptcy. It was at war, too, for the guns only ceased to boom on the eastern frontier on October 18, 1920.

The resurgence, the vitality, the indomitable character of the race, have once more appeared in the strongest light and have for the time being dwarfed its other qualities. When Poland's boundaries have been finally fixed by just agreements mutually come to with all her neighbours, or, failing that, by the friendly offices of the League of Nations, when she is assured of freedom and safety, and



delivered from all fear of a new partition, she will surely slip from her shoulders her mantle of militarism,<sup>1</sup> and become again, as of old, friendly to others, cosmopolitan, tolerant ; a state in full sympathy with the highest ideals of the world of to-day.

<sup>1</sup> In 1923 Poland was believed to have an army comparable in size and preparedness for war to that of Austria-Hungary in 1913. And yet on parts of the Eastern Front whole families were still penned in ancient dug-outs and pestilential holes: former trench-lines were still traceable by the pitiful remains of the men who had died defending them.



## X

### SERFDOM AND AGRICULTURE

IN early times the words "gentleman" and "freeman" were not in Poland interchangeable terms: by the middle of the fifteenth century they had practically become so in the country districts. There had always been a very large class, including most of the workers, termed *kmetones* or *plebeii* in legal enactments, who were not of noble birth, yet were free. Many of them had originally been German immigrants or prisoners of war. They paid rent in kind—in labour—upon their superior's land for the portion of it they cultivated for themselves, and in that resembled serfs. But their freedom to live where they chose was carefully secured to them by law. In 1496, however, plebeians were forbidden to acquire land, and if possessed of it were obliged to sell. They were also forbidden to move from one place to another without a pass from their lord, which it was practically impossible to obtain. This law marks the beginning of legal serfhood in Poland at a time when villeinage, its counterpart in the West, was disappearing. The reasons for the change are rather obscure, but by analogy of circumstances and coincidence of dates we may discover at least one sufficient reason.

Let us turn first to Russia. There also in ancient times we find a large class of freemen. They stood between the 'princes' men,' or nobility, and the slaves. There were no serfs proper, for Kievan Rus did not depend on agriculture as its mainstay, but on commerce. The 'princes' men' were not of hereditary rank, nor were they territorial magnates: they were the prince's counselors and warriors, and they derived their fortunes, as he

did his, from trade and from booty won in war. Trade, however, depended on the security of the river-routes and the caravan-tracks across the steppes. Therefore the armed might of the princes and their 'comrades' was largely employed in keeping these open by holding off the raiding Tartars of the steppes, and by convoying the merchant-fleets on the Dnieper and the Black Sea.

All possibility of trade to the South and East—to the lucrative markets of Byzantium, Baghdad and elsewhere, so long the staple industry of Rus—was quite destroyed by the terrible Mongol invasion in the middle of the thirteenth century. Kievan Rus was completely overwhelmed—socially and politically destroyed—most of its inhabitants who remained alive being obliged to flee into Poland, or to emigrate into what became known later as Muscovy. This catastrophe undermined also the whole economic basis of the state. Trade being dead, the people were obliged to take to agriculture for a living, and that in comparatively unfavourable conditions. The rewards of the boyars for services rendered to their prince were now paid in land—land of a far inferior quality to that of which the state had been deprived, and in a far sterner climate.

Land by itself was, however, apart from the labour upon it, of no value, and with the economic need for labour began the exploitation of free peasants. The lords, great and small, competed for labourers, and each tried to attract peasants to his own estate and objected to their leaving it. Labour laws soon restricted the liberty of the peasants, and in process of time they were securely pinned down to their plots, which they held in return for their cultivation of their lord's land, working so many days for him and so many for themselves.

In Russia it was obligatory on the proprietor to see that his serfs had at least a minimum of food and shelter, and there were still many free peasants living in villages who had a patriarchal type of government and communal ownership of land, with periodical redivision of it that all might share alike. Half of the Russian peasants became

serfs, perhaps an even larger proportion, but the 50 per cent. or so of serfs on crown or state lands were wonderfully free and uncontrolled in their village and family life, and were comparatively well treated and prosperous. Communal ownership of land and communal self-government produced a type of mind in the Great Russian peasant which more than anything else distinguishes him from the Little Russian of the Ukraine, who was for centuries subject to the influence of Poland, where nothing of the kind ever obtained, and who is strongly individualistic.

In Poland the same need to turn to agriculture for a living presented itself two centuries later than in Russia. In early times the whole course of the Vistula had been fully Polish: the provinces on its banks were all hers so far as they belonged to any particular Power. Polish corn-barges and timber-rafts had from time immemorial been floated down its stream, from even the remotest districts, to be shipped from Dantzic at its mouth. There is every reason to believe also that Poland offered an overland route for a part at least of the great trade in Eastern goods and luxuries which sprang up in the steps of the Crusaders. The ease with which the Vistula and its tributaries, with their Baltic outlet, can be linked up with the Bug, Dniester and Dnieper, which flow into the Black Sea, must always have been of the greatest importance to commerce. The Polish plain itself, even apart from the river routes, is a natural highway between East and West. Warsaw is to-day the main centre of the railway systems that carry the through traffic of Europe and Asia. Railways follow the lines of least physical resistance and of most profitable business, and we may take it that the old trade routes did the same.

Venice also may be used to illustrate the economic history of Poland. She offers an excellent example of the attraction of a good and central situation for trade, and of the decline of that trade when conditions become unfavourable. Her position at the head of the Adriatic, which carries the Mediterranean far into Continental Europe, gave wealth and importance to Venice. She was

in mediæval times the greatest centre of distribution between the Levantine termini of the Asiatic caravan routes and Central Europe. In her case decline set in, not because the sea was closed to her vessels and her trade route blocked, but because Eastern trade was in large measure diverted to northern ports, such as Antwerp and London, by the discovery in 1480 of the passage round the Cape, and the inauguration in 1497 of an all-oceanic route between the Indies and Europe.

Polish trade flourished until the end of the fifteenth century, when it began to decline, and it seems certain that its decline had similar causes to those which impoverished Venice and for centuries stopped Russia's commercial activity altogether. In the case of Poland this came about owing to the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, and their establishment in Europe. Sheer economic necessity first drove Casimir IV into hostilities with the Turks, who in 1484 had captured Kilia and Akkerman, ports at the mouths of the Danube and Dniester, and were turning their attention to the Danubian Principalities, then vassals of Poland. Hungary had been prostrated by her defeat at Mohacs in 1526, and Poland perforce took up the rôle of Champion of Europe against the Turks—"other nations," Poles boasted, "lived without care behind our shoulders"—until Russia superseded her in the eighteenth century. It is a telling circumstance that Polish trade at once turned again in this direction when the first Partition closed her Baltic outlet, while about the same time the Dardanelles were again opened by agreement between Russia and the Porte.

Poland's decline as a commercial nation, and the commencement of her agricultural activities as an important means of livelihood, as evidenced by the enslavement of her hitherto free peasantry in the sixteenth century, may, we find then, be attributed largely to the closing of her trade routes—to the virtual stoppage of overland traffic with the East. Two epoch-making events, the advent of the sterile military Ottoman power in Europe, and the circumnavigation of Africa, turned Poland into a pre-



dominantly agricultural state and made serfs of the masses of her population, then estimated at some fifteen millions.

Originally, legal jurisdiction over the serfs was confined to the royal castellans: their lords did not possess any such rights. Those peasants were free who were domiciled according to German law, or who cultivated land which they themselves had reclaimed. Serfs did not then belong to their masters: they could not be sold. But their legal position in Poland was soon made extraordinarily harsh, for ruthless labour laws were speedily enacted. The kings were forced to promise (1505, 1543, 1588) that they would not grant peasants protection against their lords. Former statutes in their favour were never revoked, but it became a fundamental principle of the constitution that "no temporal court in existence can grant the peasant redress against his lord, though property, honour or life be at stake."

And this was carried to great lengths, for in the Compact of Warsaw (1573), which granted absolute religious liberty without exception to the "*Dissidentes de Religione*"—to all non-Catholic denominations—it was at the same time provided that nothing in the statute should prevent a master from punishing his serf at his discretion, even though the serf's fault were a matter of religion. From this law there was practically no appeal, for the serf had to obtain his master's leave to bring his case before a judge.

The Polish seigneurs based their rights over their serfs on those exercised by Roman masters over their slaves. Dresner says in 1607: "Whatever was the legal power of the ancient Romans over their slaves, the same power belongs to the Polish nobles over the plebeians who are under them." There is no lack of testimony as to the harshness of this servitude. Modrzewski writes in 1559: "There is nought among you but a barbarous servitude which abandons the life of a man to . . . his lord," who may "sell his slaves like cattle." Stanislaw Leszczynski, the twice-elected king of Poland, affirms: "We scarcely make a difference between the serfs and the beasts which plough our fields. . . . With horror I mention

the law which lays upon every noble who kills a peasant only a fine of 15 francs." He might have gone further and said that a master who killed his own serf was not even fined! An eighteenth-century writer, quoted by Lelewel the historian, says: "The nobles regard the cultivator and the plebeian as dogs; that is the expression used by these abominable men, who, if they kill a peasant, whom they call the rubbish of the earth, say they have killed a dog." Finally, Coxe, an English historian and traveller who visited Poland just after the first Partition, says: "The people were poorer and humbler, and more miserable than any people we had yet observed. . . . Their whole behaviour gave evident symptoms of the abject servitude under which they groaned."

Hardly anywhere was the gulf between the upper classes and the lower so wide as in Poland.<sup>1</sup> Only in the quite unimportant town population was there any middle class. The nation consisted practically of the very large body of the lesser gentry, comparable to our country squires or lairds, with a few rich and aristocratic families heading them, and a mass of landless, rightless peasants under them. Humanity or self-interest alone imposed on the serf-owners a duty to the hapless beings put in their power by the laws of the country.

Brutalised and ground down, these unfortunates were finally left without a feeling in common with their masters, without any national consciousness, with no interest except their religion. The peasant was compelled to live on the estate of his lord on conditions settled by the latter, who exacted from the former what amount of labour he thought fit, and who had no obligations to him in return. Gradually the number of days devoted to the lord's fields (originally three) were increased, until at last in all the Polish palatinates the peasant had only one day in seven left for his own tillage! And he had to meet minor exactions as well. The most oppressive of these was the

<sup>1</sup> Though wide, the gulf was never unbridgeable: whole armies or bodies of citizens were occasionally ennobled at a blow. But socially the upper and lower classes were in different worlds.

obligation to buy only at his lord's store everything he might require beyond the produce of his plot—of course at the prices his lord chose to put upon the goods. And if, in these circumstances, the serf could not support himself, the serf might starve. In Lithuania, Poland's political partner, on the other hand, a peasant left by his lord to starve ceased automatically to be a serf.

The Poland which by the Partition lost its independence and nationality consisted, both legally and in feeling, of the Catholic nobility alone—perhaps one-fifteenth part of the population. And they were not in the position of an aristocracy conducting the affairs of a people like-minded with themselves, ready to back them up where the national welfare was concerned, as we may fairly claim was the case in England during the eighteenth century. The Polish rustic had lost interest in absolutely every question except religion, in regard to which he was impassively dogged. Only once, for a brief moment, did the peasants show a flicker of interest in the national cause, and that was when, after the second Partition, Kosciuszko freed the serfs and called upon them for help against the despoilers. Their response was immediate and enthusiastic. Armed only with scythe and flail, peasants pressed forward and rendered what service they could to the national cause. But the partitioning Powers enslaved them once more, and they sank again into apathy which was but little lifted by their emancipation in 1807 (in the Duchy of Warsaw), as that measure only made them beggars who must work for anyone at any wage offered—they were given no claim on the land they had cultivated for generations.

Having said so much about the miserable and degrading conditions of a serfdom which lasted for over three hundred years, having painted the dark side of the picture which is presented by the *legal status* of the serf, it is also incumbent upon us to consider its mitigations. And that there were such mitigations may be taken to be proved by the significant fact that there were no rebellions in Poland<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There were several rebellions in the Ukraine, but they were caused by religious persecution.

actually caused by the people's condition as serfs. In Russia, on the other hand, they were of constant occurrence. During the reign of Nicholas I, when emancipation was long overdue, there was an average of twenty revolts and disturbances among the peasants every year. Nor were these new phenomena caused by hope deferred. The rebellions of Stenko Razin in the seventeenth century, and of Pugachef in the eighteenth, developed into peasant risings unparalleled in the history of Europe for their ferocity, destructiveness and sheer bloody cruelty. They afford some measure of the ignorant hopeless misery of people who took such terrible vengeance on their neighbours and their masters.

In the matter of serfdom we may fairly claim that where Poland differed from other Central European countries it was for the better. She freed her serfs in 1794;<sup>1</sup> Prussia freed hers in 1823, Austria hers in 1848, Russia hers in 1861. There was, too, a certain kindly patriarchal character about Polish country life which assuaged the cruelties of *legal* serfhood. The administration of justice was no doubt in the hands of the seigneur, who was alone judge and jury; but criminal cases were outwith his authority, and he was always bound to act according to due process of law, and not according to his own will or whim. Many of the proprietors, too, were enlightened and had the Polish passion for democratic experiment. Some allowed the village elders to share jurisdiction; others gave their tenants security of tenure, or increased their communal rights; others instituted sickness insurance and savings banks. In the eighteenth century village autonomy was granted on royal and church estates, which contained over one-third of the total population, and infantrymen were recruited from among these peasants—soldiers who were not infrequently ennobled on the field of battle “for valour.”

And, we may ask, what of the Polish peasant to-day?

<sup>1</sup> Kosciuszko did not suppress forced labour entirely, but he restored freedom of movement to the serfs, and gave them a right in perpetuity to the usufruct of their land.



Never was there a greater transformation! During the last half-century the cultural, social and economic standards of the Polish village have been improved beyond recognition. The peasant, for ages scarcely aware of his nationality, has in that regard found himself. From being a passive sufferer of political events in which he took no interest and over which he had no control, he has become consciously a Pole, and from him present-day Polish nationalism derives its strength. During his age-long oppression he clung to his land tenaciously, no matter how little time he had for its cultivation, or how burdensome his *corvée* might be. He has not lost his love for his fields, but he has gained a patriotic conception of his country, and with it—marvellously—all the greatest of its national characteristics. He knows well the romantic epochs of its history, and loves the stories of Piast and Casimir the peasant kings, of Jadwiga, the lovely young queen who gave herself in marriage to her rude Lithuanian suitor that his people might be won for Christ, of the patriot Kosciuszko who first emancipated him and then enlisted him to fight for Poland's freedom, were it only with hay-fork and reaping-hook—to whom he raised with his own hands the remarkably symbolic monument at Cracow, where the hero's ashes now lie at rest in Poland's Valhalla.

The peasant of the nineteenth century never acquiesced in the foreign domination of his country: he always regarded rule by Teuton or Russian as a passing evil, to be borne, as it could not meantime be removed. He opposed a resistance to the hard fact of the Partition which proved more obstinate and unconquerable than the more vocal and spectacular efforts of the nobility of "The Emigration." The peasantry have, during all their bitter experiences under their late masters, shown a courage, endurance and tenacity, even a practical wisdom and administrative ability, which augur well for the resuscitated Poland.

And how has all this come about? How is it that men who have made modern Poland, men like Wawrzynski the financier and social reformer, Kasprowicz the lyric

poet, Przybyrzewski<sup>1</sup> the dramatist, Reymont the novelist, could be reared in peasant homes?

In the first place, of course, the wonderful political, economic and cultural advance of the peasants is due to their emancipation and ownership of land. The former they obtained (in the Duchy of Warsaw) in 1807, the latter in 1864, and it is from that time that their progress dates. Improvement in agriculture at once began when the labourers owned the soil they tilled, however inadequate it might be in amount. The establishment of co-operative credit banks was of immense assistance, and they were managed by the peasants themselves through their representatives. Numerous associations sprang up which bought large estates and parcelled them out among the people, so that now small proprietors own twice as much of the soil as large ones; formerly the proportion was reversed. The whole trend of things is towards the evolution of Poland as a state of peasant proprietors.

Progress in agriculture was helped by education. There were Agricultural High Schools or Colleges at Warsaw and other places, and also numerous primary and secondary schools of agriculture. Parish societies were linked into larger unions, and through them were drawn into relation with central Agricultural Societies at Warsaw, Cracow, Lemberg and Posen. Lectures and examinations were organised. Laboratories, model farms, magazines, were carried on, and by means of co-operation machinery was bought and produce sold to the best advantage. The western part of the country was the most progressive, but everywhere in Poland agriculture was far in advance of that of Russia, even though up-to-date machinery and modern farming were still little known in many districts. The main crops were wheat, rye, potatoes (which employed many distilleries), sugar and tobacco; of importance also were bee-keeping and the breeding of sheep, cattle and horses.

The basic fact in Polish economics and politics is that agriculture is still the mainstay of the country, notwith-

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Pshibishevski.

standing the rapid rise of industry during the last three generations, and that therefore under universal suffrage the Polish state is in the hands of the small farmers. The life of the country that used to be based on the mansions and demesnes of country gentlemen will now be built up on the cottages and small holdings of peasant proprietors. They are maturing politically very rapidly, for, largely owing to the patriotic self-devotion of some of the noble families and of the priests who surreptitiously supplemented the totally inadequate provisions of the Russian Government, there has been a great development of education among the peasants. They have also been organised for national and political purposes in a very thorough and efficient manner. They are radically antagonistic to bureaucratic control, and have had some experience of self-government.

Local government was, theoretically at least, completely autonomous in Poland. In 1864 arrangements were made in the Kingdom by which a group of neighbouring villages was erected into a commune, with an elected mayor and officials who were responsible to the Communal Assembly. (In the larger towns and villages, however, the mayors were state officials, responsible to Petrograd alone.) Such matters as the management of communal property, elementary education, care of the sick, road-making, with the levying of the taxes necessary to carry them out, devolved upon the local authorities, who thus received valuable training in public work. The imposition, after a time, of Russian as the official language was a great drawback, as it delivered the unlearned village elders into the power of their clerk, a Government employé, and too often a Government spy. In Galicia the communes were entirely free, while in Posen they constantly suffered from Government interference.

There was as a rule the greatest difference between the appearance of the village and its inhabitants in the Kingdom and in Galicia. In the former, where all free expression of the Polish spirit was forbidden, the scattered

cottages of the village were poor, squalid and dirty, and the dress of the people ugly and tasteless. In the latter the wooden or brick houses, whitewashed and thatched, each surrounded by its barn, stable and other outhouses, looked comfortable and picturesque, even if on examination they were sometimes found to consist of only two rooms, one for the family, the other for the live-stock! Their verandas were adorned with quaint hand-done paintings, or by simply modelled and carved decorations. The national costumes, which are gay and bright with many colours, and which are different for each province, were always worn. The most curious combinations of colours are used in these dresses—yellow skirts shot with purple, green and pink, for instance, worn with bodices of black velvet brightened with many rows of coral or other beads, preserved as precious heirlooms from generation to generation. However bizarre, they never seem to be inharmonious, perhaps because the dyes are remarkably pure, or perhaps because there is a quality in the atmosphere that tones down contrasts and subdues extremes. A group of peasant women in a market-place in Austrian Poland gave the impression of a flower-bed in an old-world garden, and pleased the eye in the same fashion. The lot of the peasant women, however, was toilsome in the extreme. As in Russia, their value depended chiefly on their capacity for work and for increasing the family resources by child-bearing. But however poor their circumstances or unremitting their toil, there was nothing coarse or vulgar about the Polish peasants, male or female: close contact revealed no commonness or essential lack of refinement.

There can be little doubt, now that Poland has recovered the control of her own fortunes, that the Polish peasant and small farmer will be one of the assets of Europe, as he is the hope of his own nation. He is staunch, thrifty, industrious, sober, intelligent, and has retained his hope, faith and fervour. In a world so sadly disillusioned as post-war Europe, where optimism and steady endeavour are rare phenomena, a disposition such as his cannot be too highly valued.



## XI

### COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

IN the industrial field, which Poland may be said to have entered less than a century ago, she has been handicapped by her political divisions, and by the self-regarding considerations which led each of her several masters to view Polish interests as entirely subservient to his own. This was symbolised by the fact that on Poland's natural artery of trade, the Vistula, goods must cross three frontiers, encounter three customs houses. During the Partition period, therefore, Polish exports went by way of Odessa, Libau, Stettin, and even Hamburg, to all of which freights were cheaper than to Dantzig, where the Prussians had besides imposed tariffs that in themselves were practically prohibitive. For Prussia was merely concerned to prevent Dantzig, even while under her suzerainty, from rivalling her own seaports. Their trade doubled and trebled, while that of Dantzig dwindled and the city vegetated. Since the Great War a compromise has been effected between the claims of Poland to Dantzig and those of Prussia. The former rested on historic, racial and economic grounds ; the latter on those of recent possession and convenience.<sup>1</sup> The city with its surrounding district has been constituted a Free State in which all parties are intended to be on an equal footing and whose governor is a neutral. In April, 1922, a treaty came into force between Poland and the new Free State constituting the two countries a single customs union and giving the subjects of both full mutual rights. All restrictions on

<sup>1</sup> The territory of Dantzig, of course, interposed between East and West Prussia.

trade are now repealed, and Dantzic will again become, when Poland's commercial system is adjusted to its natural route, what its position at the mouth of the Vistula entitles it to be—the chief entrepôt for the country which occupies the basin of that river.

Another very severe handicap on Polish prosperity was that her railways owed their origin and direction principally to strategic needs, and were built to serve—or defeat—the same rival interests. A sufficient railway system<sup>1</sup> of commercial utility is a vital necessity, and transport is being completely reorganised. This is but one of the many hard problems in the spheres of commerce, industry and finance with which the Poland which has come into being since the War is faced. The horrible havoc caused by the operations of the War, the troubles which followed it—privation, disease, Bolshevik propaganda, industrial unrest, administrative inexperience, a state of war on four fronts which lasted for many months—all combined to create for the new state at its inception a situation of overwhelming difficulty.

The early economic history of Poland was chequered by world developments over which she had no control,<sup>2</sup> and by the unusual political ideas and devices of her ruling class, the only “legal” Poles. They deliberately depressed in their own interests<sup>3</sup> both the burghers and the farmers. Poland had a sufficiently fertile soil and a naturally good situation for trade, but neither the “legal” Poles nor their Diet gave any heed to questions of material improvement or of economic development. Trade and commerce were considered impossible occupations for Polish gentlemen, and were therefore probably quite indifferent to them.

The decline of the Hanse towns in the sixteenth century, and particularly of Great Novgorod the enterprising city-state of old Russia, provided an impetus for Polish trade which had suffered from the decline of overland trade

<sup>1</sup> In 1912 there were in Congress Poland 5.5 km. of railroad for every 1,000 km. of territory; in Galicia 52.5 km.; in Germany (including Posen) 113 km.; in Belgium 160 km.

<sup>2</sup> See page 166 *et seq*

<sup>3</sup> See page 57.

from the East. Dantzig became much busier than it had been when under the stifling control of the Teutonic Knights, or than it was when Prussia again took possession of it in 1793. A few figures for the export of grain from Dantzig at different times will speak for themselves.

1490	..	...	..	24,500	tons
1617	..	..	..	289,000	„
1871	..	..	..	189,000	„
1900	..	..	..	180,000	„
1910	..	..	..	130,000	„

Poland's chief exports have always been cereals and timber. Of late years sugar, tobacco and the produce of her mine-fields have been added to them. Agriculture being still her main industry, we may observe that Poland counts much for the future on her large crops of sugar-beet ; for sugar shipped from Dantzig has a good opportunity of establishment in British markets now that political and economic conditions in Russia have cut off the Ukrainian supply, which reached us from Odessa.

The expanding Polish population is a favourable political and economic factor which cannot be ignored and which always troubled the Germans. The Polish birth-rate is said to be as much as 25 per cent. higher than the German, and it is slightly higher also than that of either the Great or the Little Russians. Authorities have hitherto differed in regard to the number of the Poles ; some have put it as low as 23,000,000, others as high as 35,000,000, and all have included in their calculations the large and solid blocks of Poles in the United States and South America. The figure 27,160,163 was, however, given for the total population of Poland in a pamphlet <sup>1</sup> recently officially issued. Of this number 18,660,000 are claimed as being Poles.

Poland is rich in coal, the basic material of industry, and the seams are exceptionally accessible and easily worked. Petroleum takes rank after coal among mineral products ; then come salt, iron-ore, zinc and copper.

There are two coal-fields in the former Congress Poland,

<sup>1</sup> "A Short Economic Survey of Poland: 1923."

the Dombrowa and Cracow basins, whose produce to the amount of (in round figures) 9,000,000 tons was in 1913 consumed at home. But they only supplied less than half of the needs of the country, and nearly 8,000,000 tons were imported from Upper Silesia, and 2,000,000 tons from Germany, Russia and elsewhere. From these figures we see how important it was for Poland to gain possession of at least part of the coal-fields of Upper Silesia. In the "industrial triangle"<sup>1</sup> of that province the coal-fields have been so highly developed under German management that it is calculated that they will be exhausted in from sixty to one hundred years. This very much enhances the value of the as yet undeveloped area in the south-east of the province awarded to Poland. It has been surveyed and tested, and in the districts of Pless and Rybnik there are immense reserves of coal of good quality. The possession of this region should set Poland on her feet commercially. The new state, no longer cut off from the sea and from mineral supplies, is independent economically of Germany: it has the means of prosperity in the modern world in its own hands.

The iron production of Upper Silesia means a great deal for Poland, and it will be stimulated by the abolition of the tariffs imposed by the Russian Government, tariffs which constantly increased from 1887 onwards. Congress Poland has raw materials which she alone can profitably supply to Upper Silesia—timber, for instance, and cereals, flour, potatoes and live-stock. There was before the War a large trade in such things in spite of tariffs and other disabilities, and it will increase as Poland restores her industries and rebuilds her railways, and so increases her demand for Upper Silesian iron and coal.

On all accounts one welcomed the decision of the League of Nations announced on October 21, 1921. It divided the disputed territory on lines which are a compromise and which prevent for fifteen years—would that

<sup>1</sup> Gleiwicz may be described as the apex of the triangle, and a line joining Kattowicz and Tarnowicz as its base. Poland received 83 per cent. of the industrial establishments in Upper Silesia.



it had been for ever!—tariff or currency barriers from ruining what had hitherto been an economic unit. The difficulty of arriving at a workable solution of the problem was immense. A “clean cut” in two was impossible. It would have separated coal from iron-ore; separated



power-stations from the factories they served; cut off the water-supply of whole districts; broken up the complicated railway network; set up a customs wall in a homogeneous area, and allowed two currencies to hamper business transactions.

The League brushed aside all preconceived ideas and set itself to maintain the economic unity of a district which it divided politically. Its award runs on lines new to history. Yet both Germany and Poland ratified the League's decision without difficulty, and agreed to entrust the working of the agreement to a mixed commission with a neutral chairman. It is an extremely ingenious and interesting experiment, one that may well prove to be epoch-making. Everything depends on its working. It is of the best augury that peace succeeded clamour, and that civil order superseded armed disorder in the district directly the League, at the instance of the Supreme Council, took the question up and lifted it out of the political arena, and that the commission made a good start.<sup>1</sup>

Upper Silesia had belonged to Prussia since 1742, when Frederick the Great wrested it from Austria: Posen was acquired by her at the second Partition (1793). That it was the chief grain-growing province of Germany, explains Prince Bismarck's saying, "We cannot afford to lose Posen." But both Posen and West Prussia have been restored to Poland, which has taken over with them more than a million very convinced Germans, people whose business connections were all with Germany and who must find adjustment very difficult. They had besides, as sharers of a modern and efficient civilisation, great advantages—good roads, for instance, numerous railways, sanitary houses and surroundings, and excellent education. There can be no doubt that modern Poland can have for a long time nothing to offer her new subjects in material comfort, in advanced social regulations, or in opportunities for culture, comparable to the conditions they enjoyed as German subjects. On the other hand, the Poles of this province suffered much persecution at the hands of their harsh Teutonic masters. They may have become somewhat narrow and provincial in their

<sup>1</sup> It was reported in April, 1922, that the "only remaining contentious question in the Germano-Polish Conference has been settled in a conciliatory spirit."

outlook, but they benefited greatly by their contact with and experience of German organisation and business methods. They were quick to learn, and are now efficient, hard-working and thrifty. The improvement has solid foundations: it was not commenced "from the towers and battlements," as was too much the Polish manner in olden days. Prussian Poland has every chance to take the lead in the organisation of the commercial and industrial activities of the whole country.

At the time of the first Partition, Galicia was the most backward part of Poland, and it did not share in the social and economic revival of the rest of the country begun after that event. The neglectful and repressive policy of the Austrian Government, and its fiscal exactions, for many years only served to accentuate Galician depression. The outlook, however, changed in 1861 when the province was granted self-government: but even then it laboured under handicaps too many and too severe for progress to be very rapid. Communications were very poor; agricultural methods were of the most primitive nature; taxation, especially that on new enterprises, was excessive; there was no educational system, and the Galician Poles were isolated from the more progressive sections of their own race by political barriers, and from the fuller life of the Empire by the intervention of the massive Carpathian range, over whose passes even to-day the communications are but scanty. Galicia will gain, rather than lose, by being reunited to the rest of Poland which is her natural market.

During the period of her autonomy under the sceptre of the Tsar between 1815 and 1830 Congress Poland herself laid the foundation of industries based on her abundant raw materials. Sufficient labour was supplied by the emancipated serfs, many of whom drifted to the new industrial towns and villages. Most industries received their machinery and plant from Germany or through German agents, and technical experts and skilled artisans were brought in, also chiefly from that country. Capital was supplied by the Bank of Poland, founded in

1828 by Prince Xavier Lubecki, to whom Poland's financial revival was due, and by loan societies. The textile mills which raised the small village of Lodz to be the Manchester of Poland were started during this period. The linen mills of Zyrardow were established a little later, and the industries of Warsaw and of the other older towns received a great impetus. Heavy tariffs and disabilities imposed in 1831 and 1834 hardly checked Polish progress, while the abolition of the customs barrier between Russia and Poland in 1850 opened up for the latter vast new markets to the East. At about the same time steam power was being introduced into the factories, which immediately began to respond to the demands of new buyers, and the development of railway transit in the late sixties enabled Poland to avail herself fully of the more favourable conditions. In 1877 a new Russian tariff law effectually protected Poland, lately become a component part of the Empire, from European competition.

The expansion of Polish industries since that time has been very marked. Three classes of goods may be taken for comparison and their value given in round figures.

		1876	1912
Cotton	.. ..	£2,000,000	£15,000,000
Wool	.. ..	1,000,000	9,000,000
Iron	.. ..	1,000,000	11,000,000

The value of Poland's industrial products as a whole was in 1910 put as high as £85,500,000, of which the products of distilleries, breweries and sugar refineries amounted to almost one-third.

Though a great proportion of the trade which has so flourished was really in the hands of German firms which established branches in Poland, the Poles have had much administrative and business experience within the Russian Empire, and once the wheels of commerce revolve freely again, they will be able to carry on, though their competition need never be a subject of anxiety to Westerners. But Polish factories were largely ruined by the War. their fittings requisitioned by the Germans, or dismantled by the Russians who transported machinery of every kind



to the far interior of the country whence it can never be recovered ; therefore Poland has been under the necessity of starting many of her works *de novo*, and that in circumstances of financial stringency and political uncertainty which depress enterprise.

Notwithstanding the comparative prosperity enjoyed by Congress Poland after her final incorporation with the body of Russia, it would be a mistake to conclude that Russia favoured Polish industry : rather the reverse. Russia abolished the Bank of Poland in 1885 ; she neglected Polish communications, whether by canal, river or road ; the railways she built, and they were few in number, were primarily intended for strategic uses ; she so arranged railway freights that goods could go cheaply from Russia to Poland, but that transit of Polish goods, or of goods in Poland, was almost prohibitive. An independent Poland could hardly have greater or more troublesome obstacles placed in her way by a hostile Russia. And yet, even in such conditions, Polish trade flourished ! Is not that of good augury for the future ?

But very much depends, as we see it, on her relations with Russia, and on the speedy recovery of that country.<sup>1</sup> Poland cannot compete industrially with Germany in normal circumstances, nor with any Western country : her natural markets are Russia and the Far East. Her prosperity is therefore bound up with that of Russia. The crying need of that country is to get trade and industry restarted, and the Soviet Government is very well aware of it. It has for some time been sacrificing the pure principles of Communism that men may see it to be worth their while to put money and energy into business. And Soviet Russia is also vitally interested in Poland's attitude and willingness to be friendly. M. Krassin, who in such matters speaks for his Government, said in an interview : <sup>2</sup> " If Poland's policy becomes

<sup>1</sup> That Poland appreciates this is shown by her action in joining with Esthonia and Latvia just before the Genoa Conference in suggesting that Soviet Russia should be given *de jure* recognition as a necessary preliminary to her rehabilitation.

<sup>2</sup> Published in *The Sunday Times* of March 6, 1921.

too Western, and she refuses to allow Soviet Russia to import goods from Germany by not giving transit, she may be in danger of losing her independence." The Peace of Riga was a hard one for Russia—in normal conditions no Russian Government would have signed it—and showed Poland possessed of a grasping spirit. In time, however, when bitter feeling is allayed and mutual fears and suspicions lose their poignancy, economic needs will oblige both Governments to find a *modus vivendi* which will be of mutual help and benefit. May it be sooner rather than later !

There can be no doubt that some day in the not too far distant future the small extensions of the Russian railway system which are needed to connect India and China directly with Europe will be made, and an overland commerce greater than in times past will come into being. All such traffic, as we know, must pass through Warsaw, for Poland lies across the great overland route from Europe into Asia. Will Poland be able to take advantage of the opportunities of trade expanded in this fashion ?

That question cannot as yet be answered with certainty, but the Polish Government is alive to the importance of the whole trade situation and is making a courageous fight to win through. As soon as the new Poland arose, attempts were made to open up pre-war business connections, and the rebuilding of plant and the refitting of machinery were put in hand. But the difficulties proved too great for the securing of Western trade : questions of credit, currency and political feeling stood in the way. The Government did not at first understand the importance of export trade if imports were desired, and hampered it by a system of restrictions and licenses. In fact, in its anxiety to encourage industry and secure revenue, it ceaselessly manipulated tariffs and financial arrangements generally. As it became evident, however, that governmental meddling was not the best way of attaining these objects, a decided movement took place towards the ideal of free trade. Most commercial restrictions are now removed, and the trade balance is steadily improving.

Poland's main difficulties are those of all Central Europe, and may be summed up as the budget and the currency: their settlement is largely an international affair and does not rest with one country alone. There can be no question that the establishment of a national Government whose business is primarily the interests of Poland will have a favourable effect on Polish industries and on all problems of domestic development and welfare, but the larger international troubles are beyond its jurisdiction: their solution is an obligation which falls on the greater Powers or on the instrument they have created for the purpose, the League of Nations. The stabilisation of Europe, the settlement of the nations within accepted frontiers and the establishment of mutually beneficial political relationships, which it must be the aim of every true statesman to bring about, would give Poland more favourable conditions than she has ever had. An era of industrial expansion and of national well-being dwarfing anything yet known to her would surely ensue.

In the last resort, however, the independence and prosperity of Poland must depend on herself, on her capacity for keeping the peace and for self-restraint, for satisfying the legitimate demands of her labouring population, for increased production, efficient administration and orderly progress. And one is glad to acknowledge that the Government is awake to its responsibilities here also. Its policy includes a programme of radical improvement in education and in the conditions of labour. Much social legislation <sup>1</sup> has already been passed and other measures are under consideration by a commission provided in the constitution for that purpose. Such matters "should be studied before action is taken: impulsive action is not advisable for social legislation," remarked a leader <sup>2</sup> of the peasant party which is in power. *Festina*

<sup>1</sup> Bills providing for old-age pensions, an eight hours' day, compensation for illness and accident, free education and agrarian reform are among the number.

<sup>2</sup> M. Pavel Bobek, in an interview with the correspondent of the *Morning Post* at Warsaw, February 6, 1921.

*lente* is a new motto for Poland, but in her broken and almost bankrupt state it is an excellent one.

Industrially, Poland has many assets—a geographical position that favours commerce ; abundant raw materials ; a prolific people who have proved themselves industrious and thrifty when they had an opportunity to do so ; race solidarity and patriotic ardour. Poland's friends, founding upon such considerations, and believing that one day a real peace will dawn upon Europe, predict for her a great and prosperous future.



## XII

### CERTAIN ASPECTS OF POLISH LIFE AND CHARACTER

IN Poland it has always been the life of the countryside that counted: its "rough home-spun squires" had the main share in the guidance of their country's destinies for many a day. Rural magnates had, usually, houses in the capital and lived in them during the winter, but neither gentry nor people cared for city life as such. Both have, however, for a century past been to some extent forced into it, the peasants as workers in industrial communities, the nobles as recruits to trade or commerce. Oligarchical exclusiveness is no longer a mark of the Polish aristocracy.

Polish country houses<sup>1</sup> are one-storied, wide-spreading and roomy, with red roofs and white walls, generally built of wood or brick, with adjoining garden, orchard and fish-pond. They are often what we should consider barely furnished and comfortless, but scrupulously clean and with abundant service. Men and maids seem contented, and their service is no eye-service, perhaps because their masters and mistresses are very affable and approachable, human beings whose sympathy and consideration may be depended upon. Poles are generous hosts, most open-handed and sociable. They have a liberal cuisine that is all their own, and the ladies are good housewives—though that word is hardly appropriate where household economics are on so large a scale. They are able not only to captain their homes, but to direct affairs in

<sup>1</sup> The descriptions in this and the following paragraphs apply to the half-century before the Great War.

minute detail, and have perfected housekeeping into an art in keeping with their exquisite dressing. They do not design and beautify their numberless lovely frocks merely to be "in the fashion." They take the same pride in their artistic creations in dress that a painter does in his work.

Polish ladies are intensely womanly, with a very large measure of "the eternal feminine" in their composition; but they are true aristocrats without small-minded, trivial or bourgeois traits. They are famed for their beauty, which has been praised in the most glowing language by, among others, Heine and Liszt. Sometimes they are perfect blondes with blue eyes, shining golden hair and skins of a gleaming white purity, which is the approved type: oftener brunettes with rich dark-brown hair. They are good wives and mothers, and devote much time to social and charitable work, and especially to the education in Polish of their children and dependents. Manly gallantry is a tradition in Poland, where there never was any feminist agitation or burning "woman question."

Polish women are devoted adherents of the Church, and are intensely patriotic. That the Polish eagle was never tamed; that no means was ever found of converting a Pole into a German or a Russian, though it was sought long and deliberately; that the love of freedom and fatherland never died out of an oppressed nation, was in large measure owing to the brave Polish women. They "kept the fountain-head of the national life pure and incorruptible." Patriotism breathed upon the cradles of the Poles; they heard it in their lullabys; from their earliest youth they learned to sing "Jeszcze Polska nie zginela"—"Poland has not perished yet!" While motherhood remained, patriotism could not desert a race thus nurtured.

Poles all delight in dancing and in social intercourse, for which they have a natural aptitude. They love to live lavishly, and have a debonair oblivion of money-matters and a grand-seigneur carelessness about debts other than those of honour. This side of Polish life was

exemplified in the past by the rich and splendid costume<sup>1</sup> of the Polish lord, its long-fringed sash heavy with gold and silver embroidery. Rich and beautiful clothes were everyday wear, and their lovely stitchery gave an impression of beauty and refined luxury of living and splendour of position. When the Equestrian Order went to war the camp became veritably a Field of Cloth of Gold. All appeared in rich uniform, magnificently accoutred, bridles of massive silver links or jingling with precious ornaments, saddles embellished with ostrich feathers and golden flowers, and all head-pieces crowned with waving plumes. The Polish chivalry had a superb disdain of danger and a wonderful élan in attack, which, however, did not always serve it in lieu of reasonable preparation and prudence.

Polish men are strong and active, manly, devoted to sport, particularly to hunting, and love to be for ever in the saddle. They have particularly courteous and agreeable manners, though no doubt, as someone remarks, it "would be naïve to take their complimentary politeness and pretended modesty too literally"! As a people Poles are optimistic; full of vitality; proud; highly imaginative and artistic; tactful and tasteful; fond of travel and of varied accomplishments. One critic says unkindly that they have "many talents and but little perseverance"! Another, more complacent, puts it that they have "a keen and brilliant intellectual versatility"!

The Polish landlord of the present day is no absentee: he lives and works among the people. Estates vary in size from 40 to 400,000 acres, but there are comparatively few of a middle size. The pride of every large estate is to be self-sufficing. Everything<sup>2</sup> needed by the community is produced there. The workers may number several hundreds, and they are housed in villages where the necessary industries are carried on, cloth, boots, harness,

<sup>1</sup> This costume was the prototype of our Lancer uniform. In *Pan Tadeusz* Mickiewicz thus describes a Polish lord's sash: "On the one side it is of gold with purple flowers; on the other of black silk with silver checks. Such a belt can be worn on either side: the part woven with gold for festive days, the reverse for days of mourning."

<sup>2</sup> Coffee is perhaps the only exception.

etc., are made. Plant for dealing with the sugar-beet, a distillery and a brewery, save carriage and preserve the refuse of the farm produce for use where it grew. Meadow and woodland, hundreds of acres of tilled fields, fish-ponds, the care of cattle, horses, pigs, poultry and bees, give work for all in the miniature empire of a great estate, whose lord often rules as absolutely as any emperor and whose whole time is given to its management.

In the smaller country houses, which are, of course, the most numerous, everyone rises early and takes part in the work of the house or the farm, the women particularly being exceedingly hard workers. Almost everything in the daily economy is made at home: furniture, clothing and household linen; bread, cured provisions and preserves; wines and cordials, and, of course, such ordinary things as cheese and butter, are made on the estate. Time is found, too, for carving and embroidery with which to adorn the hand-made articles in use, and for the preparation of condiments and pickles to enrich and make savoury the varied and abundant viands of storeroom and kitchen. Mickiewicz gives a charming description of a Polish country house like this:—

Amid such fields as these, long years ago,  
By a brook, on a slope, amid a grove of birches,  
There stood a country house of wood on stone.  
Its white walls shone afar, the whiter still  
That it stood out from the dark green of poplars  
That gave it shelter from the autumn winds.  
Not large the dwelling-house, but neat and snug.  
A mighty barn it had, and near the barn  
Three stacks of hay its roof could not contain.  
'Twas clear the neighbourhood was rich in corn,  
From the numerous sheaves that up and down the furrows  
Shone thick as stars, and from the busy ploughs  
Turning betimes the wide black fallow earth  
Clearly belonging to the house hard by—  
Tilled well and truly, like to beds of flowers.  
Plenty and order had habitation in this house;  
All might see the gate open in widest hospitality.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Translation from "Poland and the Poles," by permission of Professor Bruce Boswell, and his publishers, Messrs. Methuen & Co. Ltd.



It was in the Congress Kingdom<sup>1</sup> that, in the days before the War, one seemed to meet with the most truly typical Polish life. Speech and Press were alike fettered there—almost gagged—the dread of spy and prison lurked ever in the background : yet the gracious easy life of the manor-house went on, to all outward appearance unchecked. Men attended almost exclusively to the affairs of their demesnes, with a patience and self-restraint remarkable in a people whose turbulence was a byword ; exquisitely dressed women—irresistible because so sympathetically responsive—were ladies bountiful in their own districts ; everyone read extensively in his abundant leisure ; fine libraries, collections of pictures, varied musical instruments evidenced taste and culture ; a lavish yet delicate and tasteful hospitality prevailed. The tyranny of the Russian Government was not so searching and minute as that of the German : it could often be evaded by those who knew the ropes,<sup>2</sup> and no one troubled about worrying restrictions who could avoid them. There, at any rate, the visitor seemed to find the original Pole, a very perfect knight in a land that knew no knights !

In Posen and West Prussia the aristocrat was impoverished and often expropriated : he could not carry on the traditions of his race. And all alike, noble and peasant, were compulsorily educated in German and on the German system, with a thoroughness that did not admit of evasion. This did not make for individuality, though it did for efficiency. From a business point of view it was no doubt an advantage, but it tended to take the bloom from the fine flower of Polish nationality, though it in no way damped patriotic fervour. In Galicia, on the other hand, the Press was free, speech was free, and representative government was in operation. Developing, as they did, under the ægis of a corrupt government, these liberal institutions seemed to unchain the excessive Polish individualism, and rival parties often competed in abuse

<sup>1</sup> Even now it is said that there are 120,000 noble families in this part of Poland.

<sup>2</sup> The extent of the complicity between the corrupt Russian police and law-breakers of all sorts is almost incredible to the Western mind.

and recrimination—as rival parties are apt to do all the world over ! Still the fascinating and characteristic life of the countryside was there, its free expression unchecked. National dances, costumes and songs, prevailed everywhere. The national tongue was heard, even in the open street !

Though the Poles were separated politically and for many decades obliged to speak their several masters' languages, they never abandoned their own. As employed by an artist in words like Mickiewicz, the Polish language<sup>1</sup>—a language without slang!—is a wonderful vehicle of expression. It is full, copious, sonorous, with a faint regular accent that gives it a stately dignity, which, however, is relieved in conversation by much gesticulation and an animated, even vehement, manner. Its hard consecutive consonantal sounds, almost impossible to Western lips, are often redeemed from harshness by the quality of Polish voices, which are soft, low and musical—even when they belong to chattering market-women ! It is capable of rendering delicate shades of meaning, and is full of words whose sounds suggest their sense.<sup>2</sup> Mickiewicz's pictures of natural sights and sounds in his native woods of Lithuania are as vivid to the ear as to the imagination. One plainly sees the "branches swinging on high like green thick-drooping clouds," hears, in a tumultuous rush of words which are echoes, "the gale rave, wailing, howling, crashing, thundering," a deafening tumult like "a roaring sea rocking overhead."

It is thought by some that Polish sounds best and most characteristically in recitals of deeds of derring-do, in tales of fierce terrifying charges by the light horsemen who were the glory of the Polish army. But it is capable, too, of idyllic charm. Mickiewicz describes with gossamer touch the squirrel, which, "like a woodland dancer, leaps from tree to tree, twinkling, flashing past like lightning" ;

<sup>1</sup> The Polish language is Aryan. Its alphabet is Latin, whose twenty-four letters are adapted in a rather complicated manner to the thirty-six difficult Polish sounds. The spelling is phonetic, the accent always on the penultimate syllable.

<sup>2</sup> Onomatopœia.

tells how "the moths, the bat's little sisters, swarm in wreaths"; how the notes of the hunter's horn follow each other "ever softer, ever purer, more tender, till they die away somewhere afar off on the threshold of heaven."

When the Polish state was first formed, each clan entered it as a distinct unit of which all the individuals were free and equal, and entitled to bear the family coat-of-arms. Surnames were not in use: but eventually families adopted the name of the village or district, adding "ski" to it, "ski" having a similar significance<sup>1</sup> to that of the French "de," or the German "von." There were no titles in Poland proper. The title of Prince, however, distinguished descendants of the Russian Grand Duke Rurik and the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gedymin. Polish Counts or Barons,<sup>2</sup> so-called, merely used those designations to indicate their position in their own land to Westerners, who are accustomed to a hierarchy of titled nobility—or it may be occasionally for reasons not so free from reproach!

But if the Polish grandes did not depend on titles for distinction, they did on office. "A dog without a tail is like a gentleman without a Government post," says a Polish proverb. The offices of state, honorary and other, were duplicated for Poland and for Lithuania, and were also reproduced in the provinces, where every Palatinate had his cupbearer and pantler. Every gentleman was provided with some honourable post or another: though his duties might be more or less menial, every such functionary, from the highest to the lowest, was of noble birth, a birth that was in no way besmirched by his office.

By old laws nobility depended on possession of land. Every person who had a freehold estate, however small, and who had not engaged in manufactures or commerce, and the descendant of such a person, was a noble or gentleman who had the right to use a seal, wear a sword,

<sup>1</sup> A grammatical significance only.

<sup>2</sup> In Austrian Poland the right to use the titles of Count and Baron was latterly granted to certain classes of officials.

build a fortress, maintain troops and elect kings. Though in one sense a separate caste, the aristocracy was not so in another. Masses of people were, in special circumstances, recruited into it, as we have had occasion to note already. Thus the nobility was a more numerous body in Poland than elsewhere, and its influence was proportionately greater.

The Polish army consisted only of cavalry. When occasionally infantry or artillery units were employed they were almost always foreign mercenaries. Theoretically the native army consisted of a small standing force, reinforced in emergencies by a *levée en masse* among the noblesse, who were assumed to be soldiers born and to be instinctively skilled in the profession of arms. And, so far as the noblesse could be described as an aristocracy, they did doubtless possess an instinctive capacity for war. But the gentry, the smaller nobles, were engaged in the daily business of farming, in disposing of agricultural produce and in directing unintelligent serf labour, and the fighting value of their class declined gradually to vanishing point. They had the narrowness of outlook and the obtuse conservatism common to farmers the world over, and as the eighteenth century neared its close they became more and more pacifist in disposition, and disliked more and more the very idea of a strong military organisation. "Non-intervention in the affairs of foreign states," was their watchword—a watchword whose corollary came to be, practically, "No armed defence of our own country either." So apathetic had the Polish state become before the Partition, that it is true to say that the masses, and even the gentry, took no interest in their approaching fate, and less, if possible, in warlike means of averting it.

Thus after the ruling class had achieved its ideal of freedom and good government, it stood still, as it were, in a dead conservatism, and it took the catastrophe of 1772 to startle it out of its complacency. The nobility as a whole immovably supported things as they were, and rejected all projects of reform as attacks upon their inalienable freedom—freedom to legislate, tempered by



the right of any deputy to hold up all legislation unless his own pet nostrum were put through; freedom to elect the king of his choice, tempered by foreign influence in the shape of the unashamed acceptance of bribes. Words are hardly required to emphasise the extent to which the pacifism and indifference of the smaller Polish gentry facilitated the downfall of the state and played into the hands of their enemies.

The Poles had acquired, too, an unfortunate and inveterate habit which was far from making for peace or stability, namely that of continually invoking the intervention of other nations in their domestic quarrels, and of selling them their votes, whether in the Diet or in the election of a king. This trait, which in the case of Poland has so shocked the world, was not exhibited only by her, but was general in the Europe of the eighteenth century, and it ill beseems Britons to hold up holy hands of horror in this connection. Rather let us remember Walpole and the cynical maxim<sup>r</sup> on which he won his domestic political triumphs! Instances abound of the fact that bribery was at that time held by public men to be a proper means of obtaining their objects. How was it, for instance, that the generals of the Empress Elizabeth of Russia could win battles, but could never exploit their victories, so that Frederick the Great was saved from ruin, and that not once nor twice? Very simply because Russian generals had their price, and because treachery lurked even in the court itself. The wonder, it may plausibly be argued, was not that so much money was spent on buying Polish support for the schemes of the various courts, but that on the whole the expenditure effected so little. Anarchical, short-sighted, wanting in political sense, the Poles indubitably were, but not as a whole people base or venal. Still, the undeniable venality of so many members of the Polish aristocracy is hard to understand when one remembers the Pole's reputation for patriotism and believes that certainly his main characteristic is his individualism.

That every man has his price.

The statement that the Pole was impatient of restraint or discipline needs no elaboration, but the idealism that underlay it is not always given due value. His notion of government, when the Pole conducted the affairs of his country himself, was that the rights of the individual far outweighed those of the state. The many provincial Dietines counted for more than the central Diet: the opinion of a single deputy for more than the combined opinions of the whole body. The *Liberum Veto* has been explained by a Pole of to-day as "an ideal unfortunately impossible of attainment, the ideal that every law was to have the full, free and unanimous assent of those who were to obey it." And this ideal was much more than a mere pious opinion among the Poles, for they retained the *Liberum Veto* and other extravagant safeguards of freedom for generations, despite every effort at reform and every warning of their ultimate effect, to their own great detriment and final destruction as a nation.

But it is proper to enter a caution here, and to remind ourselves that the "full, free and unanimous assent" desired was that only of the aristocratic persons (who with their families numbered about a million) that counted legally in Poland. The serfs had neither part nor lot in this matter, nor the middle class.

A Polish characteristic, which went curiously with their political exclusiveness, was their tolerant spirit. Even the Jews, everywhere else in the Middle Ages subjected to persecution, occasionally even to violent expulsion, were treated with slightly contemptuous friendliness by the Poles, and it has been computed that more than half of all the Jews in the world lived in Poland on that account.

For several centuries, while in the West the different religious protagonists were torturing and burning each other in God's name, all religions were free from persecution in Poland, and that at a time when Protestantism meant the German foe on the one hand and Orthodoxy meant the Russian enemy on the other. Laws against dissenters were passed and administrative orders were

given as a result of intrigues or to please scheming ecclesiastics, but they were seldom enforced in the practical work of government. The love of liberty in which the Poles were nurtured would barely tolerate persecution even by the prelates of their own Church, and when religious differences were at their height of bitterness they respected the claims of heretics to property and to certain individual rights. The kings, and particularly Sigismund II, by their deliberate sagacious policy, held the scales even. And, no matter what strife of sectarian fury might rage over their heads, the simply steadfast agricultural population held quietly to their faith and continued to observe the feasts and fasts of the Church's year to which they were accustomed. So, when the clamour of the Reformation Epoch died away, Poland was discovered still at her old moorings—but not unchanged!

The spirit of toleration which the nation had preserved without serious break through the earlier centuries gave way in the seventeenth and eighteenth, when religious persecution had practically ceased in the West. Why? It is hard satisfactorily to answer that question, but we may hazard at any rate three reasons for this change of heart and deterioration of conduct. One is that Poland's might was then on the decline, that she had more reason to fear Russia than Russia had to fear her, and that a mistaken policy led her to try to bind her Orthodox subjects more closely to her by inducing or forcing them to become Catholic as she was. Another is the hardening, sterilising and reactionary Jesuit spirit and propaganda which then dominated Polish thought and culture. Yet another is the ever-increasing exasperation caused by faction and misrule, which year by year was making the temper of the Polish nobles less forbearing and tolerant. This was turning them, always little kings in their own domains, into autocrats, and, in the eastern provinces where matters were worst, into autocrats who very often delegated their authority to unworthy agents. These conditions, however, have passed. Intolerance would never be characteristic of a normal

Poland, the more so that the Pole is self-critical by nature, receptive of ideas, full of interest in, and admiration of, other nations, particularly those of the West, and therefore unlikely to harbour animosity against any who may differ from him.

On a review of Polish characteristics we may suggest that these were not only of the heroic and brilliant, but unpractical, order, as is usually supposed, but that we find also evidence of simple civic virtue, and even of virtue of the prosaic and humdrum kind. Poles carried their qualities, good or bad, to excess, and the question naturally arises whether their intense pride of race, their pronounced individualism, their proneness to imitation<sup>1</sup> of others, their mercurial and artistic temperament, will allow them to develop into a strong, self-sufficing and stable nation. Have they learned the lessons of national unity, of pursuing the greatest good of the greatest number and of allowing the will of the majority to prevail, that are the only possible conditions of government in a civilised democratic state? One wonders! One hopes too!

For, after all, the Poles must possess more tenacity and strength of purpose than they have usually been credited with. They have been engaged in a successful struggle for existence with the persevering and steadfast Germans for a millennium. They had, for a century and a half, to strain against all the might of Russia and Prussia in order to retain their individuality as a people—and they have retained it. Not only so, but they have, in spite of every obstacle, improved their country's position in education, which makes an enormous appeal to them, in commerce, and in all departments both of culture and of industry. The peasants, too, are now a political force, and can make their weight felt. The rugged indomitable spirit, the dogged tenacity that enabled them to cling unconquerably to their homesteads and their religion in good times and bad alike, will give balance to the lighter, more impressionable nature of the upper classes.

<sup>1</sup> In a phrase used in a moment of self-criticism the poet Slowacki called his country "the peacock and the parrot of the nations."



Possibly to foreigners the most striking feature of the Polish temperament is its complex and contradictory nature. We profoundly admire their chivalry and artistry, their ceremonious and dignified manner of life; but we see also their reckless and undisciplined side, their lack of political insight and *savoir-faire*. We find them noble-minded, yet unstable; optimistic, yet full of sentimental melancholy; given to pomp and show—did not Slowacki<sup>1</sup> liken God Himself to “the fiery plume on the proud helmet”?—yet enjoying intensely the finer and more intellectual pleasures of life, books, music, pictures; credulous—did they not believe that as they were no other nation’s enemies and did not desire to impose their will on any, no nation would desire to harm them?—credulous and easily imposed on, yet full of pride and self-esteem; fervently willing the end, the preservation of their national freedom and independence, yet not willing the means, reasonable precaution against growing dangers, reasonable distrust of openly selfish and unscrupulous neighbours.

After the tragic failure of their effort in 1863 to throw off the foreign yoke, the Poles showed another spirit. They were no longer romanticists as in the previous four decades: their hopes no longer soared on wings of mysticism, boundless faith and idealism.<sup>2</sup> They learned to face realities, to understand the immediate need of compromise, to desire to build on solid foundations of fact and opportunity, rather than on day-dreams and dramatic imaginings. And that their progress on those lines before the Great War was very solid and appreciable cannot be denied. The new Poland, consisting of the whole nation and not merely of a privileged minority, will be infinitely stronger than the old. She will, we confidently hope, be able to rise to the level of which she is capable, and so to contribute her full and individual share to the world’s progress.

<sup>1</sup> In *Bentowski*.

<sup>2</sup> Compare page 233 *et seq.*

### XIII

#### POLISH NATIONAL MUSIC

WHEN one listens to Polish music, says Professor Bruce Boswell,<sup>1</sup> "Poland ceases to be a mystery; it becomes a wonderful stimulating reality; a complex of images that one cannot formulate or express," but which one can feel and realise. The revelation of Poland in music calls up before us "a long undying tradition of things fine and beautiful," things which have survived from an age "grander and more spacious" than ours.

Complete self-expression has indeed only been possible for the Pole in recent times in music, the art which provides no opportunity for the censor and the spy. In its music the spirit of the race has been able to show itself unfettered in all its individuality, now tender and pensive, now bold and gay, now sweetly melancholy: always Polish, always distinctive, revealing the very soul of an intensely tasteful and artistic people.

It has been said that a simple Slav peasant can be drawn to the ends of the earth by the lure of his native songs, and certainly their number and beauty, whether Russian or Polish, testifies to the innate love of music of those peoples. Of Polish folk-songs alone a collection which fills thirty-six volumes was made by Oskar Kolberg, a schoolfellow of Chopin, and first published<sup>2</sup> by the Academy of Science at Cracow. His enthusiastic labours are comparable to those of Burns, who saved from oblivion the ancient songs and ballads of Scotland with their characteristic tunes, or to those of Elias Lönnrot, who

<sup>1</sup> *Poland and the Poles.*

<sup>2</sup> A later edition, *Piesni ludu Polskiego*, was published in Warsaw in 1857

collected the Finnish ballads and fashioned them into the primitive Epic of the Kalevala. A century ago favourable conditions still existed for the study of folklore of every kind. The culture of civilisation had not penetrated to the lower strata of society, and art-music had not vitiated the simplicity which delighted in folk-music. The people still loved to repeat the tales of olden days; they still danced to the rhythmic tunes and sang the ballads that had charmed their remote ancestors.

In early times music naturally found its home in the Church, that generous patron of all the arts: architecture, painting, needlework, penmanship, music, were all employed in service of the Church in days when the laity were too rude and too much preoccupied with problems of offence and defence to pay much attention to them. Thus canticles and carols made up the first song-books, and in the latter at least the people took an active part. The picture of a dimly lighted church, with its "crib" and figures of the Babe of Bethlehem and His parents round which the people danced and sang their Christmas hymns—often in mazurka dance-rhythm—lingers pleasantly in the imagination.

Polish church-music begins with the famous *Boga Rodzica*, a hymn to "The Mother of God, worshipped by the Poles and the Slavs." It is a modal tune of great interest, rough and quaint, but impressive even to-day. It was Poland's national hymn from the eleventh century to the thirteenth, and is said to have been composed by St. Adalbert, that indefatigable missionary to the Poles and the Prussians, whose bones, after his martyrdom by the latter, were enshrined in Poland's ancient cathedral at GnieŹno.

Outside the church doors there were, however, always the folk-song and the folk-dance, tunes and rhythms as old as the race itself. In them melody and accent accurately reflected the national mind and appealed to all alike, to the peasant on the village green and to the noble family in the hall. In those remote days secular music was also represented by military and ceremonial

music, flourishes and fanfares of trumpets and drums for use on the march or on state occasions.

This first phase of Polish music, the national one, culminated in the reigns of the last Jagiellos and the first elected kings, but then and afterwards the music of the nobility, as distinguished from that of the people, had an exotic aspect. Sigismund I was particularly fond of architecture, "his one extravagance," and of music. His queen, Bona of Ferrara, made Cracow a centre of culture of the Italian school, and Mass was first performed to music in the cathedral there. During this period music had munificent patrons in the nobility and the kings, many of whom were its ardent lovers, among them Stephen Bathory and John Sobieski, better known to most of us as military commanders of supreme genius. Musicians formed part of the suites of the sovereigns, and every noble had his orchestra, his theatre, even his opera and ballet. These were indispensable parts of the economy of those great houses whose wealth and magnificence were famous throughout Europe.

But to this "Golden Age" of music, made memorable to all music-lovers by the genius of Palestrina and his peers, succeeded in Poland an epoch of sterility during the times of the later elective kings and of the political decline of the state. The arts again awoke to life, however, in the reign of the last Polish king, Stanislaw Poniatowski, who drew artists from all Europe to his court, where a national opera was created. Fundamentally, however, the culture and music of his time were also exotic, for the first Polish operas followed foreign, and particularly French, styles, though an original element was introduced into them by the employment of popular themes taken from peasant life.

Up to this point Polish music was exclusively a national concern, without influence on the culture of Europe, and practically unknown to Western peoples. With the advent of Chopin all that was changed. Polish music assumed an international aspect. Its sweet, sad and emotional language has for us now an indescribable fascination, but



when first introduced to the peoples of the West in the works of Chopin it was a startling and almost repellent novelty. Its melting tenderness and melancholy made, however, a magical appeal, and no music lies nearer to our hearts. Many Polish airs have a haunting feminine charm because they are full of the gentle, peaceful and plaintive values of the third and sixth of the scale. The firm and manly tonic and the trumpet-tongued and assertive dominant do not colour Polish music as they do at any rate the classical music of the West.

In this respect the closes of Polish music are typical: melodies occasionally end on the second, or even on the seventh, of the scale. When harmonised they do not close with ear-filling and soul-sating common chords solidly founded and firmly sustained and emphasised in the bass, a fashion prevalent in Western music. Take as an example among many which might be cited Chopin's A Major Prelude: after the climax it gradually fades away and thins out until only three notes are left, and those high up on the piano—a common chord doubtless, but so etherialised and refined as to be hardly recognisable as such. This seems to be a characteristic feature of Polish music in general, as it certainly is of Chopin's.

A third feature of Polish music is that its pervading sadness is "rather the outcome of the thoughtful and sentimental temperament than of the dejection of despair. . . . The true soul of the heroic Pole delivers itself of sadness in songs. (Even his) joy is tinged with intense melancholy."<sup>1</sup> He yields himself to the mood of the moment with temperamental adaptability and much enjoyment! But, however melancholy it may be, Polish music never descends to despair: the buoyancy of the national temperament is too great for that. The ending of Tchaikowski's Pathetic Symphony, which seems to give us the dying groans of a world lost and descended to an Inferno where those who enter abandon hope and from which there can be no resurrection, could not have been written by a Pole. There is always an under-current of

<sup>1</sup> Madame Walaux, *The National Music of Poland*.

hope even in his most unrelieved sadness. We do not feel that the drip drip, drip drip, of the rain in Chopin's B Minor Prelude is doomed to continue for ever. Rather, as it dies away in soft, tranquil "whispering murmurs," one feels that only the rain has ended. There is hope that in the pale dawn that will succeed this night of storm, birds will still call to their mates, and men will, as of old, "go forth unto their work and to their labour, until the evening."

The feelings called forth by every great epoch, by every national hero, expressed themselves in song, and some of the national airs have the most poignant political significance. The mazurka of "The Third May," for instance, is an expression of devout joy and thankfulness on the occasion when the king and Diet, in full session, confirmed the new constitution which all hoped would inaugurate a new Poland, fit and able to retain her place in Europe. This was in 1791, just before the second Partition which blasted those hopes.

The well-known "Jeszcze Polska," the Mazurka Dombrowski, breathes the very spirit of youth and of heroic recklessness. This stirring song belongs to 1797, when, after the final Partition, indomitable young Poles were enlisting under the banners of the French Republic and of Napoleon, to whom they looked for the restoration of their national freedom. "Have no fear," is its message. "Have no fear! Poland still lives. March, march, Dombrowski! It is joy to live, to sing, to fight! March, march, Dombrowski!"

The slow gravity and the mournful wails of the "March of 1831" paint the sorrows of the Polish exiles who trod with painful steps the Via Dolorosa to Siberia in that calamitous year when the Emperor Nicholas I "made an example of Poland." Let us trace the martyrs' road in the words of the poet Mickiewicz:—

These white streaks are roads (he says) so long that they seem without end! Through deserts, through snowdrifts, they all lead to the North. . . . See this multitude . . . driven as by the wind all in the same direction! O Heavens, they are our children! And wilt Thou suffer them all to perish in their youth? And wilt Thou destroy our generation even to the end?

The Lament or Chorale of 1846, *Z Dymen Pozarow*, was written after the Galician massacres, when the peasants, deceived by the Austrians, set upon their Polish masters and exterminated more than two thousand of them in a terrible "peasants' fury." It expresses the despair of the race at seeing their hopes thus brought to nought by their own people. It is a sort of penitential psalm in which love of country becomes a religion.

Our lamentation mounts up to Thee, O Lord, with the smoke of incendiary fires, with the dust soaked with our brothers' blood. . . . Eternally, as a monument to Thine anger, our imploring hands are stretched out to Thee. . . . The son has slain his mother, the brother has slain his brother: a multitude of Cains is among us now. Lord, it is not they who are guilty. . . . Oh, punish the hand, not the blind sword.

Even this most mournful of Polish songs ends on a note of hope. "The oil of freedom shall cleanse their guilt. . . . Our answer: God was and God is." The Chorale to which Ujejski's noble words are set is worthy of them. Its cadences rise and fall like swelling tides of lamentation, mourning and woe, but possess withal a dignity and restraint wholly beautiful, and quite unlike the enervation of despair.

Nor must we omit to mention *Boże coś Polske*, Poland's National Anthem, probably the most beautiful in the world. One wonders if its sweet and melancholy accents will suit the new Poland that has been born out of the travail of the Great War. Certain it is that the composers who are writing the songs of to-day write, as compared with their predecessors, in a light, one might almost say a frivolous, strain. No wonder: national resurrection, not alien oppression, is their theme, and Pilsudski, not Kosciuszko, is their hero!

The second, the international, phase of Polish music begins, and probably for many of us ends, with Frederick Chopin (1809-1849). Pachmann, Paderewski, Wieniawski, the brothers de Reszke we know, probably other Polish executant artists, but as a creative artist Chopin fills for us the Polish heavens. Moniuszko (1819-1872), the second

great Polish composer, the true creator of Polish national opera, is to the ordinary Briton a name merely, if as much. But in any case Chopin stands in a class apart.

He was, within his limits,<sup>1</sup> one of the greatest and most original of creative artists and of pianoforte virtuosi. He was supreme as a composer and performer of lyrics for that instrument, in which "thought and form, matter and manner, shade of emotion and shade of style, blend perfectly."<sup>2</sup> The exquisite and aristocratic refinement of his musical diction, no less than its originality and individuality, for ever defy duplication, or even successful imitation. His invention, though confined for the most part within rhythmic bounds and small forms imposed by his predilection for the mazurka, prelude or polonaise, was inexhaustible. He found new ways of saying new things—how new it is difficult for us now to understand—and he said them so inevitably and perfectly that they remain as flawless and inimitable gems, or as "weird crystals transparent in their eccentricity," faultless in their truth and poetry.

Chopin introduced to Western Europe a new world, the Slavonic world, whose genius is entirely different from that of other races. It is not too much to say that in becoming acquainted with his music many people realise for the first time quite definitely that there is a Slavonic mentality more apart from the Teutonic or Latin than they are from each other. He enshrined in his art the whole spirit of a people, and that more completely than any one else has ever done. Though Chopin was no mere pipe for Pan to play through, very much in his music is of national significance and must be ascribed to the indwelling spirit of the rarely poetic and artistic race of which he came; for Chopin was a true Pole and loved his native land only the more as his exile from it

<sup>1</sup> Limits set by temperament—Chopin was the most subjective of artists—and by a genius intense rather than broad. His was a purely pianoforte style, neither polyphonic nor orchestral. "Laissez-moi ne faire que de la musique de piano," he said himself. "Pour faire des opéras je ne suis pas assez savant."

<sup>2</sup> Article on Chopin in Grove's *Dictionary of Music*.



lengthened. He derived from Polish folk-music the most characteristic peculiarities, rhythmic, melodic and harmonic, of his style. He translated lovingly and faithfully into the medium of sound the poetry, the gaiety, the sadness of the Polish heart. He effected this alchemy by making use of melodic materials and dance-forms<sup>1</sup> that were the simple primitive outcome of the peoples' lives, idiosyncrasies and circumstances. Their inmost hearts and vital characteristics are revealed in his music, transmuted into fairy gold by the magic of the Master's hand.

Chopin's work represents the finest flower of romanticism in music, and corresponds to the splendid national literature that was being produced at the same time and in similar circumstances of poverty and exile by the great Polish trio of romantic poets, Mickiewicz, Krasinski and Slowacki. His work resembles theirs in its charm, delicacy, imagination and originality. It does not lack, nor does theirs, masculine virtue and strength. Heroic rage, warlike chivalry, sheer delight in life and manly grip, are found in his larger works; but he would not be a Pole, and a Pole of the Emigration at that, if poetic sentiment and profound melancholy did not also colour and inform everything he wrote, and give it an appeal and a place in our affections peculiar to itself.

As has been indicated, all the various dance-forms that bulk so largely in Polish life are to be found in Chopin's compositions, interwoven with delicate filigree and fancies of his own. They have been, as Professor Niecks<sup>2</sup> says, subjected to "a process of refinement and development. . . . The popular tunes are spiritualised and their corresponding musical idioms are subtilised and individualised" by the composer. If one hears first the simple melody and rhythm of a mazurka or a polonaise conveyed in the sixteen bars that contain its form, and

<sup>1</sup> Never after his 'teens of specific melodies or dance-tunes. Chopin's compositions have the spirit rather than the form of Polish dance-music.

<sup>2</sup> *The Life of Frederick Chopin.*

# MAZURKA OF THE THIRD MAY.

791.

Tempo Commodo.

Musical score for Mazurka of the Third May, No. 791. The score is in 2/4 time and G major. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a first ending marked '1.' and a second ending marked '2.'. The second system includes a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking and a 'tempo primo' (return to original tempo) marking. The piece concludes with a 'p' (piano) dynamic marking.

# JESZCZE POLSKA.

797.

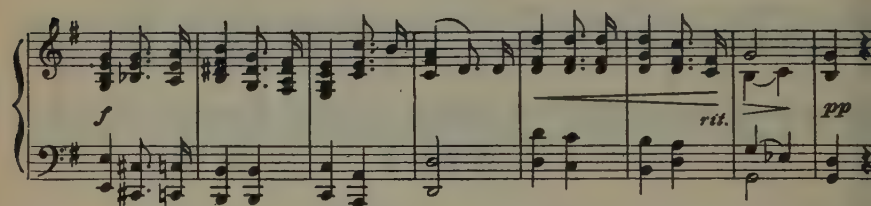
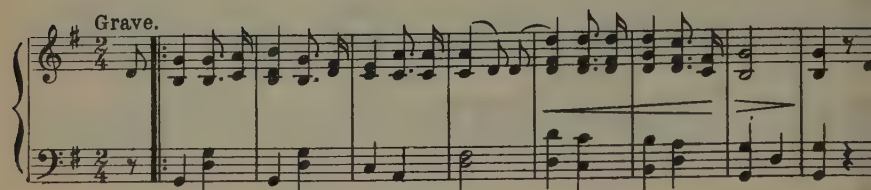
WIBICKI.

Quick and lively.

Musical score for Jeszcze Polska, No. 797. The score is in 2/4 time and G major. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a first ending marked '1.' and a second ending marked '2.'. The second system includes a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking and a 'p tempo primo' (piano, return to original tempo) marking. The piece concludes with a 'p' (piano) dynamic marking.

# MARSZ PO ROKU 1831.

1831.



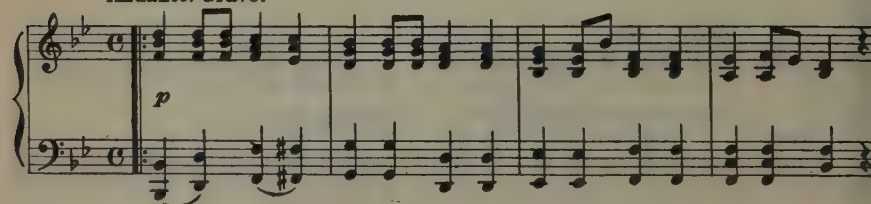
## WITH THE SMOKE OF THE FIRES.

CHORALE.

1846. UJEŃSKI.

NEKOROWI

Andante. Grave.





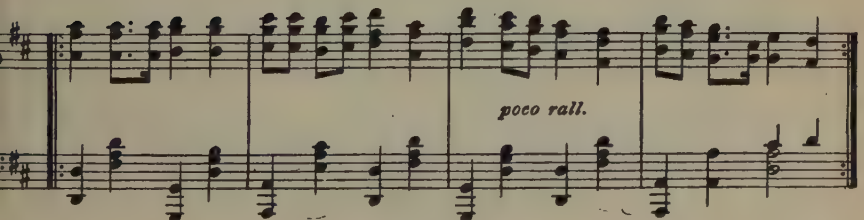
# BOŻE COŚ POLSKE.

POLISH NATIONAL ANTHEM.

3th Century.

KASZEWSKI.

Andante Religioso.







then listens to one of Chopin's masterpieces, one appreciates the profound difference between nature and art, between the expressions of the primitive emotions of unsophisticated man, who sings and dances frankly and ingenuously because he needs that relief, and the outpourings of the latter-day artist. *He* is neither simply sad nor simply gay, but is driven to artistic self-revelation by impulses and stresses as various as his elaborations of primitive forms. In this sense Chopin's music is the sublimation of the poetic soul of Poland.

The really national dance is the Mazur. It originally belonged to the province of Mazovia and arose in the fifteenth century among the popular musicians. Though first danced to lute and fiddle in peasant gatherings, and treating of things belonging to simple country life, the Mazur soon became the true national form. It is emblematic of private or social life, as the Polonaise is of political life. The dance is long, difficult and intricate, for the partners use different steps while dancing hand in hand. Rhythmic and varied movements of the body, and specially of the head, impart grace to it. Gentleness and strength are both reflected in its gesture and music; it can be fervent or tender, good-humoured and lively, or full of a gentle melancholy. At one point in the dance, indicated by a climax and a pause, the wooing and winning of a maid by a man are typified. After an exchange of courtesies they go off together again, the lady almost carried in her cavalier's arms!

The Mazur is a dance loved and used by all Poles: the Krakowiak is a peasants' dance. It belongs to Little Poland and originated in the seventeenth century. It is a spirited bustling country dance with a monotonous and marked rhythm. Satirical or topical verses, often improvised, are sung with it, and the national peasants' costumes, bright and gay as posies of flowers, are worn.

The Polonaise belongs to Great Poland, and was the dance of the aristocracy and of the court. It is said to

have originated in the sixteenth century at the state reception of Henry of Valois as king, when, in a formal dance, the courtiers and their wives passed in a long procession before the throne. But it was used also in the country in olden days. Mickiewicz gives in *Pan Tadeusz* a description of it as he may have seen it in his own country society in his youth. He finishes his account of an informal and easy-going performance by exclaiming : " Look, young people, perhaps this is the last (Chamberlain) who will know how to conduct the Polonaise ! "

It is time to begin the Polonaise. The Chamberlain comes forward ; he lightly throws back the lapels of his overcoat, twists his moustache, offers his hand to Sophia, and with a courtly bow invites her for the first couple. Behind them range the other dancers, two and two : the signal is given ; the dance is begun ; the Chamberlain leads off. His red boots glance over the greensward ; his sabre flashes ; his magnificent belt gleams in the light. He proceeds slowly as if with reluctance ; but in every one of his steps, in every one of his movements, one can read the feelings and the thoughts of the dancer. Now he stops as if to question his partner ; he leans towards her, wishes to whisper in her ear. The lady turns away, does not listen, blushes. He takes off his cap and salutes her humbly. The lady condescends to look at him, but keeps a stubborn silence. He slackens his pace, questions her looks with his eye, and at length smiles. Happy in her sign in response he steps more quickly, looking proudly at his rivals. . . . At times he tries to turn aside, changing the direction, as if he would fain mislead his comrades. But they follow him with nimble step, envelope him with the loops of the dance. . . . He turns, pride on his brow, a challenge in his eye, and marches straight on the company, who do not dare to keep step. The dancers open a passage for him, and soon, changing their order, set off again after him. . . . Couples follow couples, noisy and gay. They unwind : then they turn again in a wheel, like a great snake twirling in a thousand-fold scroll. The many-hued costumes of the ladies and soldiers and lords change like the flashing scales of a fish, gilt with the setting sun's rays. Whirls on fast and furious the dance : the music rings out ; ring out the plaudits and toasts.<sup>1</sup>

The typical Polonaise, however, the Polonaise as painted by Chopin and as danced before the War in the best society of Warsaw, is a stately procession, a " Marche

<sup>1</sup> Translation revised by Professor Bruce Boswell.

Dansante," in which the aristocracy is accurately reflected. With its proud solemnity, its grave themes, its deliberate march, its beating rhythms and martial passion, it is emblematic of chivalry and of military glory. It is at the same time a "weaving, cadenced, voluptuous dance,"<sup>1</sup> a symbol of love and of the wooing of the coy and elusive maiden by the armed warrior. It is ceremonious, with much fine gesture and stately movement made gracious and graceful by the noble courteous bearing of Polish men of the upper classes, and the soft and dreamy beauty of the women, with their tiny hands and feet, their expressive eyes, and their complexions "of an incredible loveliness," to quote an artist<sup>2</sup> who visited Poland in 1913. "It is the patriotism of a deeply poetic nature that has formed them; and Religion; and Pity; and filial Piety. . . . There are no such women's faces in England now: the twentieth century has a beauty of its own, but diverse, and Poland is still living in the eighteenth."

During the last century dancing among the Poles was not an expression of mere light-hearted happiness, nor were the national dances indulged in altogether for their own sakes. The seeming gaiety of Polish society—and nowhere, as Brandes points out, was the life of society so important as in that land where there was no other life—its dancing and music, were conscious manifestations of nationalism. Poland, in chains, with the ominous word "Siberia" ever sounding in her ears, talked brilliantly and irresponsibly on every subject<sup>3</sup> to pass the weary days ere her sons might again find reasonable<sup>4</sup> employment in the service of their country. She engaged in the national dances with acute realisation of their symbolism and significance. In them, as in Chopin's mazurkas—"pathetic dances"<sup>5</sup> in which the deepest, the

<sup>1</sup> Madame Walaux.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Frances Little, *Sketches in Poland*.

<sup>3</sup> Except politics!

<sup>4</sup> No Pole might occupy a Government post of which the salary exceeded 1,000 roubles a year, or rise above the lowest ranks as an officer in the army.

<sup>5</sup> Ehlert.



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most heartfelt sadness has donned red buskins to weep itself to death amid a bacchanal tumult"—and in them alone, the longing expectation of an unconquerable hope found free expression.

"Ye still must dance, poor feet so weary  
In gay shoes drest,  
Though 'twere for ye a fate less sad and dreary  
'Neath earth to rest."

## XIV

### A SURVEY OF POLISH LETTERS AND LEARNING

THERE were no early writings in the Polish language, nothing corresponding to the work of the Russian annalists, or to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle—or if there were they have perished utterly. But the people were not without the myths and heroic legends which have been the spiritual food of all primitive races. Oral literature was well represented by folk-tales and ballads of which beautiful specimens still survive.

Ancient Polish history is derived from monastic chronicles written in Latin, usually by foreigners like Martin Gallus and Magister Vincent, or from the books of other nations, and particularly from the "Ancient Chronicle" of Nestor, the monk of Kiev. This lack of Polish activity in the vernacular is the more remarkable as in other Slav nations—notably in Bulgaria and Russia—there was in early times an important national literature,<sup>1</sup> which flourished even during Russia's political disintegration in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In that bad and confused time of obscure quarrels and fights between rival princes and cities, almost every town seems to have had its chronicler, who was probably an official personage. From the multitude of these small voices, one piping from every municipal nest, a very amusing insight into human nature naked and unashamed, its weaknesses and cross-currents, may be derived. Yet the *naïveté* of ancient chroniclers cannot be hidden even under the classical cloak which

<sup>1</sup> This literature owed its fertility and its greatness to the influence of Byzantium, then much more highly cultured than the West.

disguises matters Polish ; these records are indeed extremely human and artlessly frank !

After the foundation of Cracow University in the fourteenth century there arose in Poland a school of philosophy and science, and later of humane literature. This classical period, which had its full flower in Copernicus and was brought to a conclusion by Kochanowski, differed from that of Western Europe in that it lasted longer, until after the middle of the sixteenth century. It was a very splendid epoch, and especially distinguished by the life and work of its supreme figure, a man who belongs not to Poland alone, but to all mankind.

Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), who stands with Galileo and Newton in the first rank of astronomers, was not only a scientific thinker and discoverer, but a cultured man of many interests. Subjects as diverse as sanitation and coinage engaged his attention and benefited from his practical intellect. Germany, after her manner, lays claim to him as one of her sons because he was born at Thorn and sat for a time in the Prussian Landtag. She omits, however, to mention that at the time of his birth Prussia was a fief of the Polish crown, for in 1466 the Teutonic Order had definitely ceded West Prussia, of which Thorn is a chief town, to Poland ; that Copernicus's father was a native of Cracow who had settled in Thorn as a wholesale merchant, and that the famous astronomer wrote the word " Polonos " after the Latinised form of his name.<sup>1</sup> Germany's claim may therefore, we think, be dismissed without appeal !

Copernicus studied and taught at Cracow, Bologna, Padua and Ferrara, and took the degrees of Doctor in Medicine and in Canon Law. He was appointed Canon of the Cathedral of Frauenburg, and carried on the administrative and other activities of the Chapter there. But his heart was given to mathematical and astronomical studies, which he pursued for forty years, during twenty-seven of which he tells us he daily added something to his great work. But it was work which could not be openly

<sup>1</sup> The name in Polish is Mikolaj Kopernik.

carried on, as it ran counter to the teachings of the Church : yet Copernicus was a good Catholic. His was, however, an age of discovery and of new thought—was it not that of Columbus and other great navigators, of Luther and of More ?—and he persevered without qualms of conscience, buttressing himself, as he wrote, on the conviction that study of the wonderful works of God, which leads to comprehension of His wisdom, majesty and power, to appreciation in some degree of the working of His laws, must surely be a “ pleasing and acceptable mode of worship to the Most High, to whom ignorance cannot be more grateful than knowledge.”

He elaborated the thesis of Galileo, that not the sun, but the earth, moves, to a consistent system. But more important, perhaps, than his actual achievement, was the method by which he worked. He investigated the facts of the planetary and stellar systems, and then worked out theories to fit the facts, believing that mathematics, and not theology, was the proper science to be used in dealing with them. He also employed the method of investigation by analogy and introduced into mathematics the notion of infinity. Liberal and wonderfully modern modes of thought were carried by Copernicus into philosophy as well as into science. He stressed the importance of seeking truth everywhere and, when found, of freely publishing it, despite theological or other objections. To realise how bold such ideas were we have only to remember that Copernicus worked in the early sixteenth century, a time when there was no such thing as toleration in Western Europe—the Reformation Era, when the question as between authority and free inquiry was being fought out amid blood and tears and the torments of the martyrs of the new faith. We are quite safe in asserting that in no other European country than Poland could a philosopher so broad-minded as Copernicus have formulated his ideas, not only without let or hindrance, but in a position of importance which made him a marked man. But the government of Poland was, as has been seen, characterised by a wide tolerance,



At last his life's work, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Cælestium*, was completed and sent to Protestant Nuremberg to be printed. When on May 23, 1543, the eve of his death, a first copy of the book was put into his hands, a very sincere and thankful Nunc Dimittis must have sighed from the paralysed old man's lips. He could depart in peace, assured that the child of his long and faithful labour had not been strangled at birth by a heresy-hunting Church.

The greatest figure of Poland's "Golden Age"<sup>1</sup> of literature was Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584). He began his work as an admirable Latinist, but soon turned to the native language and became the founder of Polish literature. He was full of the Renaissance spirit, his days "the spacious days of great Elizabeth," an enthusiastic admirer of classical antiquity, pagan in mind and republican in political faith. He explored every poetical path and made the way easy for his successors by moulding the language to literary use. Poetry then, in its favourite form the idyll and the satire, reflected the spirit of the time, a time when the gentry—a class apart—had become reactionary and unprogressive. Idyllic writings idealised the life of the oppressed people, and satirical pieces attacked the pride of birth and the exclusiveness of privilege then so rampant in Poland. This poetical school was, of course, far beyond the comprehension of all but the cultured few, and the dead hand of the counter-reformation soon stifled it.

The Reformation took no permanent hold in Poland, partly perhaps because Protestantism arose in Germany which was always the enemy, a view of the matter which was supported by the fact that the first militant outbreaks of the Protestants occurred in Dantzic (1518, 1525), and were attributed to the ever-disloyal Teutonic Knights. Stern edicts were published against the professors of the new faith, but were not often put into operation. The "Egyptian bondage of the Prelacy"<sup>2</sup> was the subject of

<sup>1</sup> When it was boasted that there were "more Latinists in Poland than even there were in Rome."

<sup>2</sup> Even her apologists acknowledged that "Roman corruption does more harm to the Church than Lutheran perversity."

fierce outcry, and the gentry took the opportunity of refusing to pay tithes and of objecting to Papal dues. Indeed, the scandalous state of the Church in Poland then, the neglect of their duties by the higher clergy and the brutal ignorance of the lower, absolutely invited attack. Sigismund II, himself a good Catholic, tactfully took a middle course and calmed the fury of both sides, until, after 1560, the waters began to abate and Catholic feeling revived. Jesuits were admitted to the country, and it needed but little persuasion on their part to bring the mass of the heretical nobles back to the fold. No doubt they perceived that a religion of which free inquiry was a fundamental tenet would have a very bad effect, from their point of view, on the submerged masses, should it ever penetrate to them; it might lead them to demand other freedoms also! As a matter of fact, Protestantism assumed in Poland a philosophical form which made no appeal to the people as a whole. Those of the upper classes who remained Protestant were men of weight, and they and their descendants have exercised an influence disproportionate to their numbers. But Poland as a whole, as all men know, remained the faithful daughter of the Church.

The John Knox of the Catholic Revival was Peter Skarga (1536-1612), a man of great political insight and patriotism. He had immense force of character and an eloquence which makes him one of the supreme orators of the world. His sermons had the effect of actions: they were not words, but blows, and, Jesuit as he was, blows for freedom. "Look," he said, "how the citizens of the states of Turkey and Muscovy are oppressed and suffer tyrants over them. Not so your mother-land. She is no step-mother. . . . She bears you in her hands, and will not that ye suffer any wrong. Ye yourselves are injuring her. Ye make yourselves tyrants, one over another, by failing to obey the laws and by constraining the power of the state, there where ye need not." This passage occurs in one of his discourses delivered before the Diet. In another he foretold the manner of the downfall of the Polish state. "These internal strifes will bring you

into a captivity in which all your freedom will be lost and abased. . . . The only free people among all the Slav races, ye destroy what is left of this ancient and far-reaching people, and will be swallowed up by other races who hate you."

Under the vigorous propaganda of the Jesuits the tide of Protestantism, already at the turn, quickly receded, and its return was for ever prevented when education was given completely into their control. The schools being in their hands, their influence over the intellectual life of the nation was enormous. Unfortunately, their type of education, with its pedantic scholasticism, during the seventeenth century completely stifled the national genius, to which it was utterly alien. Oratory, whether in Latin more or less ecclesiastical, or in Polish, was, it has been remarked, the one talent that flourished under their auspices.

A revival began in the eighteenth century when young men, despairing of culture under such conditions, and of their country's fate under its anomalous and antiquated constitution, then pushed to its most fanatical extremes, sought counsel of Rousseau and other thinkers of his school. Thus they came under the influence of Western thought, and especially under the then forceful and vitalising stream of French classicism. Jesuit influence quickly declined. In 1773 the Order was dissolved, and its wealth was thenceforth given to education on more living and humane lines. Under Stanislaw Poniatowski, Warsaw was the centre of great intellectual activity. The court, at which poets, painters and musicians were welcome guests, became the focus of artistic talent, and education and learning on French lines changed the whole mental atmosphere of the country. But the defects of this school were soon magnified in Poland, where, after all, it was an exotic. Poetry became mechanical, conventional and over-polished; it lacked individuality; as if, in the words of Mickiewicz,<sup>†</sup> all works were "wrought from the same metal, came from the same mint."

† Pronounce Mits-kee-eh'-vitch,

The epoch of romanticism was due to develop in Poland, as elsewhere in Europe, when the catastrophe of the first Partition turned the thoughts of the Poles into practical directions. They set about reform and reconstruction in all spheres—economic, political and, not least important, cultural. The Universities of Cracow and Wilno revived and schools appeared throughout the land. In fact, a Ministry of Public Education was set up, the first in Europe, and the king, who had previously been so splendid a patron of the arts, took a leading part in the good work. Commissioners toured the country, visiting the Universities, reorganising the schools, and putting their curricula on a new and better basis. Newspapers appeared, and mental life was reborn in all the land. The famous Constitution of May 3, 1791, is an evidence of this: it is informed by the spirit of progress which then animated Poland. But, for this very reason, it gave umbrage to her former despoilers, who now completed the work of dismemberment begun in 1772. Then ensued a pause in the intellectual development of the country. Undaunted by their misfortunes, and buoyed up by the hope inspired by the military genius of Napoleon and his cautious pronouncements in their favour, the young Poles joined the armies of France, and the people lived only in their legionaries, and in dreams of their country's coming restoration.

The years 1811–1812, when Napoleon planned and set out on his Russian campaign, saw hope burn high in every Polish heart, and the joyous buoyant spirit of the time entered deep into the consciousness of Mickiewicz—the lad who was to become Poland's national poet—and inspired the greatest, rather, perhaps, the only, epic of modern times, his *Pan Tadeusz*. "O spring!" he exclaims, "memorable spring of war, and spring of harvest. O spring! Who saw thee flowering with corn and grass, brilliant in men, fertile in deed, pregnant with hope! Still do I see thee, fair dream of a night! Born in captivity, fettered in my swaddling bands, only one such spring have I known in my life." "General," he cries to Napoleon,



"long hath our Lithuania awaited thee, long as we Jews await our Messiah. Live thou and combat, O thou who art ours." "God is with Napoleon; Napoleon is with us," was the Polish watchword of those hectic days.

During all the fateful years of the Napoleonic campaigns the story of Polish literature stands still; but after their passage the blossoms of romantic poetry burst into glorious life, and the years 1820-1850 stand out as the greatest in the cultural history of the race. The University of Wilno was at this time the nursing-mother of Polish youth and the cradle of the romanticism that made the earlier half of the nineteenth century so splendid. But it was closed in 1831, as was that of Warsaw, the fine library of the latter being removed to St. Petersburg.<sup>1</sup>

Romanticism flowered late in Poland and was unique in its nature there. The years of its highest achievement are the years of Poland's deepest misery, and her history and literature go hand in hand. The true life of the people was in their imagination and inner consciousness, and the poets alone expressed it. Poetry was no more merely or chiefly an artistic creation; it was a gospel, a psalmody, a rule of life. The poets became consciously and of set purpose Poland's prophets and teachers, their work to keep hope alive and to administer consolation by giving a high ideal turn to her sufferings. These they represented as intended to purify the characters of her people, and to fit Poland to take a higher place than ever before among the nations. One or two quotations will show the attitude of the romantic poets in face of Poland's adversity better than any description could do. And it is necessary to remember that their doctrines were enthusiastically believed by the people, that for a time at least this soaring idealism was their adopted faith.

<sup>1</sup> In Poland's peace treaty with Soviet Russia (1921) is a stipulation that all books and art treasures removed from Poland between 1772 and 1918 must be restored. In the Moscow Kremlin are many Polish relics, among them the crown of the last king and the casket which encloses the Constitution of 1791.

Sow ye the seed of the love of your native land and the spirit of self-sacrifice, and be ye certain that the Commonwealth will grow again, mighty and fair. . . . Each one of you hath within his soul the seed of the nation's future laws and the measure of her future boundaries.<sup>1</sup>

O God, we pray Thee that our sufferings may be our redemption. And we will not entreat Thee to restore the sun to our eyes or the air to our lungs, for we know that Thy judgment has fallen upon us—but the new-born generation is guiltless. Have mercy, O God!<sup>2</sup>

Carry your arms against hell. Slay the black brood of demons. The guillotine and pillage are the weapons of the human race in its infancy; rage, the liberty not of man but of beast. . . . There is but one truth, divine, fruitful in deed; transfiguration through love.<sup>3</sup>

Polish romantic literature has its faults<sup>4</sup> on the artistic side, of which a want of relief and contrast may perhaps be regarded as the chief. Its range is narrow; its concentration on nationalism too exclusive; it lacks humour; it regards man too much as a soul, an intellect, too little as a human being. Except in *Pan Tadeusz* the simple peaceful side of life is ignored; the poets take themselves and their work in dead earnest. They are not artists first, but rather national missionaries who strive to keep alive in their countrymen, imprisoned in a world of oppression, repression and misery, a high and splendid patriotic ardour. But after all, though it is true that the poet is born, it is also true that he is made by the circumstances and atmosphere, mental and spiritual, of his time. How could a Pole, and a passionate patriot at that, seeing his people mourning by the waters of Babylon, jest or regard life otherwise than as did his auditors, men upon "whose backs the ploughers made long their furrows"?<sup>5</sup>

Gradually as the governmental vice tightened, freedom of expression became almost impossible within the country except in one direction, that of the exact sciences. The

<sup>1</sup> Mickiewicz, *The Book of the Polish Pilgrimage*.

<sup>2</sup> Slowacki, *Anielli*.

<sup>3</sup> Krasinski, *The Psalm of Love*.

<sup>4</sup> Based on Brandes's *Poland*.

<sup>5</sup> Literally, for Polish political prisoners were often flogged in Russian prisons, and more than one died under the knout.

most suspicious censor could hardly find treason or forbidden aspirations in chemical research or calculations of the distances of the heavenly bodies ! Then came 1863—that terrible year when the best life of the nation was lost to it by execution, deportation or emigration. Helpless, hopeless, disillusioned and exhausted, educated Poles broke away from their romantic idealism, and began to work out a new political creed and a new mental orientation suited to the utilitarian and positivist spirit which had already appeared elsewhere in Europe. Warsaw University was reopened, but in 1869 it and the schools were russianised, and Cracow, backward of late years, revived in its turn and took the lead in thought and learning. The Poles read Buckle, Mill, Darwin and Spencer instead of Byron and Scott ; acknowledged that their dreams were at present impossible of realisation, and solaced their minds with scientific work and their souls with social and philanthropic activities. Thus it came about that science, so long without Polish representatives has recently had a brilliant revival. The names of Jan Bloch the economist, of Wroblewski the physicist, of Wawrzyński the financial and social reformer, of Ashkenazy the historian, of Miss Chaplicka the Oxford anthropologist, are at least known to the learned few : that of Madame Curie, of radium fame, is known to all men.

The upper classes, ruined by the economic policy of the Russian Government, began to go into trade. Industries sprang up in certain parts of the country, and movements were set on foot for raising the status of the peasantry, for educating them, and for establishing more of them on the land. The great and energetic literary labourer of this time was Kraszewski (1812–1886), who himself exemplified his doctrines of sincere thinking and heroic working, for he castigated the romantic delusions of his countrymen in works of every variety and immense number, and indefatigably showed them the paths of sober reality in which they must walk. Świętochowski was the other great protagonist of liberalism and reason, a representative of the European culture of that age, which he spread abroad

by means of the newspapers which he founded. Then arose also the novelists who took the place of the romantic poets of the two previous generations, and worked out the problems of their time in a medium vastly different, though entirely suitable. The novels of Eliza Orzeszko are, it has been said, "hymns of praise to the ideals of progress, knowledge, duty." On the other hand, Glowacki, "Prus," mirrored the daily existence of his time somewhat in the manner of Dickens. He dealt with factory life, peasant life, town life, and his stories are full of feeling, but also full of realism, sometimes grim, sometimes humorous.

Positivism was supreme in the third quarter of the century, and had its use in giving a saner, more moderate, outlook; but it did not suit the essentially romantic Polish mind; it did not produce a single genius, or a heroic figure. Therefore the ascendancy of the Cracow and Warsaw schools of positivism was soon thrown off, and a less depreciatory attitude towards Polish history was assumed. Poles, forced into distasteful occupations, washed up on town pavements, had been obliged to discard their old-time costumes and with them their old-time ideals of nationalism. But the soul of the shopkeeper or engineer, new-style, was still the soul of the Polish gentleman, and instinct with the traditions of the race. With returning hope and buoyancy the great novelist Sienkiewicz found his opportunity. In works that "are not books, but great deeds," he gave life to glorious memories and enthusiastic visions. In his famous trilogy, *With Fire and Sword*, *The Deluge* and *Pan Wolodyowski*, he portrayed their own history for the Poles in colours far brighter than they had been taught by Lelewel and the Cracow historical school that it deserved. In his novels the Pole could again "breathe full breaths," could once more "stretch his arms with all their strength." In them the fine and chivalrous side of Polish life is vividly characterised. They are rich with glowing colour, yet in essentials true to fact and carefully worked out. Later works were *The Crusaders*, cast in the times of Jagiello



and dealing with the Teutonic Order, and *Quo Vadis*, a story of the Roman Empire in which the Poles found much to remind them of their own lives under the Russian Empire. Sienkiewicz wrote also many fine short stories. He is a historical novelist who lives in the past, a *milieu* that has been imposed on Polish authors by the conditions under which they wrote. But things have changed during the last thirty years, and literary fashions have changed with them.

Since the Great War, Polish intellectuals, owing to the lack of trained civil servants, have been engaged on the practical tasks of administration and government, and there has been no important literary output. But the years preceding the War constituted a new romantic era. Among its writers we may mention Żeromski, whose atmosphere is one of gloom and tragedy, who finds evil more powerful than good, and sees in the performance of duty heroism; Reymont, a peasant novelist who loves the soil as a peasant does, and writes of the life of his peers with an elemental force; Tetmajer, the poet of the Tatra Mountains, a lyricist and novelist with a beautiful style; Kasprowicz, another peasant poet who portrays the life of his class, and who has made some fine translations from English; Przybylski, a peasant again, a play-writer and journalist with a fine and profound mind, a love of beauty and a delicate artistic sense. Keenly intellectual, spiritually minded, a prober of the depths of the soul, he was the most influential and the strongest leader of young Poland; but in his work art tended to become estranged from life.

Perhaps the greatest figure of all modern writers was that of Wyspiański, painter, dramatist, stylist, social reformer, "a man who was a national revelation . . . under whose breath decadence melted away and the soul of the nation became regenerated." He was a depicter and champion of Labour, in whose hands he believed the future to lie. The magnificent public funeral accorded him in Cracow in 1907 showed the high place he had won in all hearts. "His spirit still stands, will ever stand, like

a pillar of fire, for the enlightenment and guidance of his nation.”<sup>1</sup>

It may confidently be claimed that Poland’s literary output of the last hundred years has shown a vitality and resilience truly remarkable. It has adjusted itself to the times, but has never lost its purity and earnestness. Possibly only one supreme genius—the national poet Mickiewicz—has appeared, but the general level of talent has been high and many authors have almost reached front rank. Polish literature well repays study, for it makes an honourable contribution to universal culture. >

And what of Lithuania? Has she any literature definitely her own, or must she be regarded in this sphere as in others as being until now a part of Poland?

The answer would seem to be that Lithuania has a copious and distinctive ballad literature of her own, but that of books in the ordinary sense there have been none, or none of any consequence, to her credit. Lithuanian songs and ballads are extraordinarily limited in their subject-matter: <sup>2</sup> they are almost entirely confined to the simple and homely scenes and experiences familiar to the rude farmers and foresters of the land. Their early heroic history, their long line of conquering princes, have left practically no traces in their folk-tales; the numberless border forays, the age-long skirmishing with Muscovy, have given hardly a subject to literature; of moss-troopers and robber-barons there can have been no dearth in a land where every year saw its excursions and alarms, where war captives by the thousand dragged out a weary existence far from home and friends: but of all this, the fertile material of folk-tales, Lithuanian ballad literature is curiously silent. Equally silent is it on the side of Christianity: saints, martyrs and heroes of religion are conspicuous only by their absence. On the other hand, nature-myths, fairy stories, legendary tales, the life and

<sup>1</sup> From *An Outline of the History of Polish Literature*, by Jan Holewinski, > which has afforded valuable guidance in this summary.

<sup>2</sup> Based on Dr. Latham’s *Nationalities of Europe*, in which are many other translations of Lithuanian folk-songs or Dainus.

occupations of primitive people, the creatures of wood and field, are depicted in language as simple as the subjects. Two little songs will make this clear, and will perhaps not unfairly represent the whole.

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|---|---|
| <p>1. Sun, daughter of God,<br/>Why so far goest thou ?<br/>Why so long waitest thou,<br/>From us departing ?</p> | <p>2. Over seas, over hills,<br/>I have looked at the meadows,<br/>I have cheered the shepherds :<br/>Many are my gifts.</p>              |
| <p>3. Sun, daughter of God,<br/>Who, morning and evening,<br/>Lights your fire,<br/>Makes your bed ?</p>          | <p>4. The Morning-Star, the Evening-Star ;<br/>The Morning-Star for my fire,<br/>The Evening-Star for my bed :<br/>Many are my mates.</p> |

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|--|--|
| <p>1. The wolf, the wolfie ;<sup>1</sup><br/>The beast of the forest<br/>Goes out of the wood<br/>Into the meadows,<br/>Worries the calves<br/>And the foals :<br/>Such is his work.</p> | <p>2. The fox, the foxie ;<br/>The beast of the forest<br/>Creeps from the wood<br/>Into the homestead,<br/>Steals and bites<br/>Cocks and geese :<br/>Such is his work.</p> |
| <p>3. The dog, the doggie ;<br/>The watcher of the house<br/>Barks and bites<br/>The thief's toes,<br/>Frightens old women<br/>And beggar-men :<br/>Such is his work.</p>                | <p>4. The flea, the wee flea ;<br/>Sucks the blood<br/>At dawn of day<br/>To wake the maids<br/>To milk the cows :<br/>Such is his work.</p>                                 |
| <p>5. The bee, the wee bee ;<br/>The insect of the forest<br/>Hums on the heath,<br/>Stings our fingers<br/>Ears and faces,<br/>Gives us his honey :<br/>Such is his work.</p>           | <p>6. Oh man, manikin ;<br/>Look at the bee<br/>Which stingest<br/>Our hearts, our hearties ;<br/>Give then comfort<br/>To your brother :<br/>Such is man's work.</p>        |

There is, however, one great writer—the greatest of Polish poets—to whom Lithuania may point with pride, for he was bone of her bone, a most loving son of the land of his fathers. Adam Mickiewicz was born on Christmas

<sup>1</sup> Diminutives are characteristic of Lithuanian poetry.

Eve, 1798, near Nowogrodek, in Zaosie, a small village inhabited chiefly by yeoman farmers. His mind was stored in childhood with Lithuanian songs and legends by the villagers and foresters and by the servants of the household. In his earliest writings, such as *Lilies* and *The Lady of the Switez Lake*, we get reflections of the tales which filled his childish imagination. *Grazyna*, his first long poem, is the story of a noble lady of Lithuania who rides forth to do battle with the Teutonic Knights that she may save her husband's honour. But it is needless to multiply instances, for all Mickiewicz's greatest works have Lithuania for their setting just as had the early poems which were written before he left his native land.

It is a rather curious circumstance that Mickiewicz, most ardent of patriots, can have been very little in Poland proper. He was educated in Lithuania and worked as a teacher there. Then, when still in his twenties, he was arrested and exiled. He spent the rest of his life in foreign countries, a sorely tried pilgrim, tormented by an exceeding nostalgia for the loved land of his youth. We must remember, however, that the culture of Lithuania was identical with that of Poland—was, indeed, derived from hers. That Mickiewicz is correctly described as a *Polish* poet there can be no question. "My heart is brothered with a great nation," he says in *Ancestors*, referring to Poland. "How is my soul incarnate in my country." "If I forget thee (sorrowing Poland), O God in heaven forget Thou me!" But all the same it is the vivid and enchanting reproductions of the scenes of his youth, of the folk-tales of his country, of its manners and men, of its patriarchal simplicity and hospitality, that are the background for the Polish poet's masterpiece, *Pan Tadeusz*. "His love of a nation's folk-lore, his passionate attachment to the soil whence it sprang, coloured the whole course of his future life and of his poetical inspiration," says Miss Gardner.

But Mickiewicz's feeling for national poetry is best conveyed by his own fine apostrophe to it in *Konrad Wallenrod*.



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O poetry of the people, ark of the covenant  
Between the former and the latter years !  
In thee the folk lays down its warriors' arms  
And weaves the flowers of its thoughts and feelings.

Such a song I heard. An ancient peasant  
Stood forth and played on a flute of willow a dirge for the dead ;  
And with wailing lament sang of you, great ancestors.  
As on the day of judgment the archangel's trump  
Shall summon from the tomb the buried past,  
So at the sound of his song the bones beneath my feet  
Gathered together and grew into giant forms.  
Pillars and domes arose from the ruins ;  
The desolate lakes throbbed with the sound of countless oars ;  
The gates of castles were flung wide to my view,  
With the glittering crowns of princes and the armour of warriors.  
The minstrels sang, the groups of maidens danced.  
Wondrous was my dream—rude was my awakening !

Gone are my native hills and woods.  
My wearied mind sinks on its drooping wings,  
Falls, and takes refuge in the silence of my home.  
My lyre is dumb in my stiffened hand :  
Amid the mournful wail of my own countrymen  
Often I cannot catch the voices of the past.

Ah ! Could I but put my fire into the hearts of those that hear me,  
And awaken to life the figures of the past that is dead ;  
Could I but pierce my brothers' hearts with ringing words—  
Then might their ancestral songs stir them in one moment  
To feel their hearts beat as of yore,  
To feel in themselves that ancient grandeur of soul,  
And live, were it but for a moment,  
As nobly as their forefathers lived of old.<sup>1</sup>

This, then, was the function and the charm of national poetry as perceived by one of the finest minds of the nineteenth century. Mickiewicz magically transmuted that of his own land, and embalmed it in phrases whose pictorial quality, rhythmic melody and sheer beauty of expression are unmatched in European literature.

<sup>1</sup> Translation by Professor Bruce Boswell.

## XV

### POLAND'S ROMANTIC POETS, THEIR TIMES AND THEIR TASK

It is a remarkable fact, and one that eloquently testifies to the energy and endurance of the race, that Poland's finest achievements in literature belong to the period, 1820-1850, when she was plunged in deepest misery, when the most useful lesson a Pole could learn was to suppress his feelings—above all, his political feelings—and “to enclose his emotions within the narrower boundaries of private life,” as Jan Sniadecki, the first writer of eminence after the Partition, put it. These proud high-spirited people had to learn under the severest penalties to put a curb on their rampant individualism, to learn to suffer and be still, to walk circumspectly, and to give no occasion to the adversary. The Polish mother was ironically exhorted by Mickiewicz to teach her son “to make his wrath subterranean, his thought unfathomable.” Yet even so “an unknown spy will accuse him; he must defend himself before a perjured court; his battlefield will be a dungeon underground and an all-powerful enemy his judge.” Mickiewicz himself had had experience of a dungeon where day and night were indistinguishable and the prisoners lost all count of time! He goes on: “A few women's tears soon dried, and the long, long talks of his countrymen in the night-time, will be the sole honour and memorial of the Polish patriot after death,” the death of the gallows.

Now if we have learned anything from our studies of Polish character and history, we must realise that this would be precisely the most difficult of all tasks for a

Pole. Nowhere did a man's individuality count for so much as in Poland; nowhere was its expression so unrestrained. We know that very many of them learned but ill the lesson of humility and self-effacement: the hopeless rebellions of 1830 and 1863 prove that—rebellions which cost them all semblance of liberty and drew their chains ever tighter.

It is almost impossible for British people to realise what a purgatory life must be in the conditions which obtained in Poland in the nineteenth century. Krasinski gives in a letter to his English friend Henry Reeve (written towards the end of 1831) a harrowing picture of the agony of the Poles of his day. Then, he says, men were waked in the night by the clank of fetters and sounds of lamentation, by the rattle of carts over the cobbles, carts whose occupants were brothers or friends, and whose ultimate destination was the snows of Siberia. Then haggard faces of people, whose only fault was their love for their country, peered through prison bars; villages and towns were sacked and burnt; women "wept hot tears for the loss of their honour torn from them by the brutality of a conqueror." He tells his friend that he, born and brought up in freedom, cannot understand the feelings of one whose forefathers were equally free, but who is himself "an oppressed slave. . . . To you everything has spoken of peace, happiness, forgetfulness. . . . I hated with all the strength of my little heart before I loved either a woman or a friend." "Think of my life," he writes to the lady<sup>1</sup> who was his Beatrice: "For fate, Siberia . . . for occupation, slavery; for hope, death."

"Administrative Procedure" superseded in Russian Poland the work of judge and jury as known to us. People, "called to battle without glory, to martyrdom without resurrection," vanished on the mere suspicion of disloyalty to prison, to torture, to undiscoverable fates. And such major ills were not all: everyday annoyances abounded and encompassed the people as by a hedge of thorns. A

<sup>1</sup> Delphina Potocka.

random word overheard in the street by a spy might involve death or exile ; the possession of a book in Polish, imprisonment. National music was forbidden ; national colours and costumes might not be worn ; the national language—" a dog's language "—was entirely prohibited ; meetings, no matter what their purpose, could only be held under police supervision. And above all—some would certainly say, worse than all—there was the censorship with its strangle-hold on mental life. Nothing was too great or too small for the censor's inspection : every literary effort, from a cookery book to an epic poem, was liable to be blacked or banned by him ! So we find that Polish authors were driven into exile, and that their works had to be read secretly and passed carefully from hand to hand.

It would be difficult to over-emphasise the influence of Poland's unhappy lot on her poets and poetry : it was a tremendous and vital handicap. They were born in a time which was " out of joint," keen to be its saviours and straitened till the work should be accomplished, but tragically unequal to it. Their spiritual weapons beat fruitlessly against the foe's massive spiritual armour of complacency, and with still less effect against his terrible material might. Both the form and the content of their work were injuriously affected. Patriotism burnt ardently within their hearts and cruel wrongs and injustices seared their souls : but shut doors confronted them in every direction. Their writings gained in spirituality and exaltation certainly, but the limits of their subject-matter were narrowed, and the manner of its expression was restricted and distorted.

The authors of that time only found a way of saying what burned within them by casting their works into allegorical forms, by making scenes and heroes of other days and other lands their media of expression. The unreal and the fantastic became solid and real at a time and in a country where straightforward words and open actions were impossible. The poet's pen, his only weapon of offence and defence, almost inevitably became a



dagger, not a sword. His writings were often cryptic, and were in some cases purposely overlaid with fantasies and obscurities. But Poles learned to read between the lines, and perhaps, as in the case of *Wallenrod*, read more than the poet intended to put there. An obvious example of such *double entente* is this ironical passage from *Ancestors*: "What does it matter if I must suffer banishment, hard labour, chains, if only as a faithful subject I am allowed to labour for my Tsar! When in the mines I have to hammer diligently and skilfully, I say to myself: 'This grey iron will some day become an axe for the Tsar.' . . . If they send me out as a colonist and I become a hetman or boyar, then I will sow my field with hemp, only hemp, for the Tsar!"

It is easy to understand that works produced under such conditions, and by men of high character and noble ideals like the great romantic poets of Poland, should have a mournfulness, a poignancy, a spiritual exaltation, a fervent heat of mysticism, an intensity of patriotic ardour amounting to religious fervour, unparalleled where conditions were easier and the outlook broader. Poland's wretchedness clouded the heavens and obscured the sun for her martyred children. It would be vain to expect them to write lightly of happy things, to have "their mouth filled with laughter and their tongue with singing" while they were "exceedingly filled with contempt . . . and with the scorning of those that are at ease," while their country's wrongs were unavenged and their liberties were eclipsed.

Their country's fortune, too, was for the most part reflected in their own. Tragedies of the heart and of the purse darkened the hours of the exiles who had left friends and living behind, and who could find no rest for weary minds or feet.

The wild dove has its nest, the worm a clod of earth,  
Each man has a country: the Pole but a grave,

are lines written for a Polish tomb. They sighed for the "Jerusalem of their return," "The long years of

wandering, over land, over sea, in cold, in hot sands, among foreign nations," were a nightmare of weary nostalgia to men whose love of country, of home and kindred, was intense.

There is not one hair on my head of those that were there of old (says Slowacki): "even the bones within me are renewed—and yet I still ever remember. And there is not one bird in the sky that cannot sleep, if but one night in its life, in a quiet nest. But God has forgotten me. I fain would die. . . . The morrow of life is more bitter than the morrow of death."

Mickiewicz, the singer of the Lithuanian forests and fields, and Zaleski, the poet of the wide Ukrainian steppes, specially suffered from the forlorn and irksome life of the exile.

This enforced sojourn in the wilderness was, however, turned to a mystical purpose by the poets, who came to regard it as a means of high moral training for the Poles. Mickiewicz wrote in his *Book of the Polish Pilgrimage* a series of moral maxims for the guidance of men who were in his eyes no simple exiles, but pilgrims scattered over a world lying in materialism and militarism, men who constituted a holier and more spiritual Israel set apart by sorrow and suffering, that they, and all men through them, might learn love and self-sacrifice. "He only can cut through his chains who is anointed with the sign of virtue. . . . To be a Pole upon this earth is to live nobly and to God," says Krasinski in *The Psalm of Love*. And again: "Whoso changeth sorrow into crime, whoso forgoeth fetters into knives and not into swords, cursed is he."

Their work became tinged with a mysticism which regarded Poland as a sacrifice for sins, as a Messiah that bore vicariously the punishment justly incurred by all peoples. In 1831, when the Emperor Nicholas was "making an example" of Poland, Garczynski wrote:—

The time will come, ye nations of Europe, when your eyes and thoughts will be fixed as if by enchantment on the bloody image of the crucified nation.

Mickiewicz says in his *Ancestors* :—

I see the cross. How long, how long yet shall my nation endure it? Lord have pity on Thy servant: give him strength that he may not fall down and expire by the way. His cross has arms so long that they stretch out over the whole of Europe: it is made of three nations which are as dried up as three withered trees,

and as little endued with the milk of human kindness. Poland is personified; her woes fill the universe; there is no help in man, and in moments of madness the poets question whether God has not forsaken them. "Christ can no longer save us," writes Krasinski in the *Undivine Comedy*, putting the words into the mouth of one whose brain was turned by excess of misery.

Do you hear the cross, which has been the hope of millions, rebounding in its fall from star to star? It breaks, it is splintered, and with its dust it fills the universe.

They, however, remain Christians and Catholics through all, though they, and notably Slowacki, may rail against the Church and Pope that had ranged themselves on the side of the big battalions of the oppressors. They make their appeal to the truths which they feel underlie the outward seeming of indifference and cruelty. "What is, is," says Krasinski. "It is not our caprices that rule the world, but the mind of God."

The doctrine of Poland's Messiahship, carried to extremes as it was by its founder the mystic Towianski and his chief disciple Mickiewicz, had a barely sane exaggeration, a want of perspective, and an inherent falsity of outlook that were unfortunate and injurious. Krasinski's version of it was on saner, more beneficial, lines, for he identified the Messiahship of Poland with the purity, love and self-sacrifice of each individual Pole.

O Lord, Thou hast given us . . . a pure life, therefore worthy of the cross, the cross that brings us to Thy stars,

he says.

There is no doubt that a very real problem was presented to thoughtful Poles by the spectacle of their country's

distressful condition, of their national overthrow, of the triumph of might over right. Why should such things happen in a world governed by a just and merciful God? Some explanation there surely must be, and the poets walked in darkness until Messianism arose upon their night like a guiding star through an inferno of mystery and pain, a star of hope as to its ultimate intention and end. By it "the dignity of a great calling was conferred upon a downtrodden people," as Miss Gardner well puts it. Their land became to Messianists an ideal, a "holy one," no longer a mere terrestrial country.

Thou art now my faith, my law; who betrayeth thee, who thee wrongeth, lieth he against his God.

Poland was in their eyes exalted by a heavenly mission; she was the channel of God's grace to the nations, therefore consecrated, sacred.

This Poland appears in the writings of the romantic poets under many symbolic figures. She is as a mother—a Rachel, weeping over her children slain; she is as one much loved and now asleep in the tomb awaiting a sure and glorious resurrection; she is the Christ of the nations enduring a cross of expiation for national sins and national redemption; she is a repentant Magdalen;<sup>1</sup> she is in Krasinski's vision a great and awful archangel crowned with the purple of sorrow and bearing the lightnings of God, to whose vicarious sufferings the ages new-born pay tribute of grateful and worshipful homage. In whatever guise, she is always the beloved, longed for and dear beyond words to the haunted hearts of the exiles.

This perfervid idealism wove a spell over the impressionable Polish nature: it appealed to the mysticism inherent in it. The canonisation by the poet-prophets of shipwrecked Poland as a holy martyr, their view of her as a sacrificial victim, their filial devotion to her cause, expressed in language that burns and thrills and haunts from its very beauty, served as a strong staff for her trembling limbs on the rough and treacherous road she had to tread

<sup>1</sup> In the verse of Zaleski alone.

Zaleski



during the gloom of oppression that enclosed her after 1831. Poles then looked on their unhappy country, "with the same eyes with which a son sees his father broken on the wheel." The poet's office was to sustain her with faith, with religious ardour ; to try by some means to "justify the ways of God to men" and explain the cause of her tribulations ; to keep her sons and daughters from fainting by the way and from relinquishing, because of mere hopeless weariness, what must often have seemed but a far-off and visionary prospect of resurrection.

Yet their apostolic fervour never failed. The two greatest of them, Mickiewicz and Krasinski, themselves hungered and thirsted after righteousness, and burned to see their countrymen also walking in the way which they thought could alone save them and their beloved land. They strove all their working days to this end, and they were eminently successful. Poland's "grave was only as the cradle of the dawn," for in spite of perils and obstructions, against heavy odds, the Polish people kept its nationality alive, its ideals unsmirched ; it continued to stand, as of old, for freedom, for the power of the spirit as opposed to the might of the strong hand. That it was able to do so was in no small measure due to the wonderful work, to the inspiring idealism, of its romantic poets.

It goes without saying that they regarded their mission seriously. "Each word is at the same time an action," said Mickiewicz. He, and the whole galaxy of his school, employed art, not for art's sake, but as a means of expression of the seer, the psalmist, the prophet. Their work spoke with a tender, yet stern, beauty of phrase and idea to hearts overburdened : it provided at the same time comfort and moral motive-power. Its value was specially great to the growing generations "taught historical lies and blasphemies." They had few other means of instruction in national ideals : this kept them Poles and patriots, and inspired them with high thoughts and devotion to a sacred cause. It provided the stoutest weapons against the germanising and russianising tendencies of the time. The poets were patriots first and all the time, but they

were also moral teachers and political leaders, and were reverentially accepted as such. For their work was taken equally seriously by readers to whom its perusal, if discovered, meant prison or Siberia. It was not intended merely to charm the fancy, or to while away an idle hour ; nor was it received in that sense. It was in truth the mental and spiritual food of two generations whose bondage was bitter beyond that of the Israelites of old.

We must, however, admit that, notwithstanding their spirituality and idealism, certain of the poet-prophets taught the Poles one lesson that cannot be commended, though it can easily be excused to men in their circumstances. They taught that "the only weapon of the slave is treachery." He whose weakness leaves him defenceless must use such means as lie to his hand : dissimulation and fraud must be his weapons. If he can neither call down fire from heaven on his enemies nor raise up powerful armies on earth to confound them, he must resort to stratagem, must dissemble in order effectively to strike at wickedness enthroned in high places. Slowacki understood the fundamental unsoundness of such philosophy, but he gave object-lessons in its application in the persons of his Lambro, a renegade Greek, and Kordjan, a Polish Hamlet. Mickiewicz's *Wallenrod* seems also to be an object-lesson designed to show how a stranger nourished as a child may turn on his unsuspecting benefactors and yet be blameless. His *Grazyna* and ~~*Alpujarras*~~ *„Alpuhara"* are open to similar interpretations.

Brandes thinks that Mickiewicz held this view "without reservations." Miss Gardner, on the other hand, says : "It is impossible to reconcile what we know of the beauty of Mickiewicz's moral character and his peculiarly lofty ideal of the function of poetry with the theory that he deliberately urged his countrymen to what would fall little short of moral suicide. It appears probable . . . that the poem (*Wallenrod*) was written out of his oppressed heart, with no definite purpose or intention." It is true that in *Ancestors* the passage "My spirit was silenced, my soul lay in the grave ; but my genius smelled blood, and

with a shriek it rises like a vampire, eager for blood. It thirsts for blood, for blood. Yea, vengeance, vengeance ! . . . Vengeance if God will, and whether God wills or not ! " is put into the mouth of a young prisoner distraught with suffering and transformed by passion and hatred, and is regarded by his fellow-prisoners as a sinful outburst to be repented of and atoned for. It is also true that his *Book of the Polish Pilgrimage*, expressly written as a guide to conduct for his oppressed people, inculcates a very different morality. But Mickiewicz must have known what interpretation friends and enemies alike placed on his work, and that "Wallenrodism" became a cult among the Poles ; for *Wallenrod* belonged to his middle period, that of his Russian exile. He never repudiated the interpretation nor denounced the cult : therefore it seems that we must conclude that he regarded "Wallenrodism," though he himself may have outgrown it, as in certain circumstances indifferent, if not morally justifiable, though in no case as the highest, the ideal, line of conduct.

Even if the doctrine of the necessity of guile and fraud in the face of superior force were the convinced philosophy of all the Polish poets of this school, which is certainly not the case, we could not blame them severely, we who know nothing of their agony. They had the naked truth of despotism before their eyes : its ruthless hand was ever upon them. We see it only through an official veil, feel it only as affecting far-off peoples, or as part of the story of far-off days. The sword of the despot pierced their own souls : the remembrance of scenes of brutality or of savage punishment were carried by them through life, and coloured their work. Therefore their poems, and especially those of Slowacki, were filled with catastrophe and destruction, and with a nightmare sense of oppression and disaster : they were apt to dwell on horrors, and vengeance became their creed.

The attitude of Krasinski to this question needs neither explanation nor defence, however it may be with his brother-poets. He was a refined and gentle soul, and abhorred vehemently the whole doctrine of vengeance,

whether underhand or above-board. "Overcome evil by good" was his creed, painfully acquired by self-mastery after much travail of soul. He desired to heal wounds by love rather than to blast wickedness by vengeance. His *Irydion* is a parable which teaches that the works of hatred are barren and self-destructive, that to dream of vengeance by any or all means poisons the heart and injures the character. Better, he cries, endure prison and torture, exile, death itself, than indulge in half-insane visions of a retribution which would only harden and degrade the mind which harbours them. Try rather to cultivate the good in yourself than to inflict evil on your enemy. Meekness and beauty of character may perhaps disarm the tyrant; but whether or no, they will be profitable for your own salvation. "It is never possible to reach by evil means a great, holy or durable end."

Though Krasinski never himself endured prison or torture, he always dwelt under their imminent shadow: he was never banished by the Government, but he lived in an exile not less irksome because self-chosen, and in any case probably inevitable. His life held a personal trial which gave it an added bitterness and perhaps a greater refinement. Political circumstances and loyalty to his father, a high-placed official, forced him when a lad at college into a terribly false position. He was devoted to his father, but differed from him entirely as to his political faith. He, however, felt it to be his duty to obey the elder man's commands, and refrained from taking part with his fellow-students in a public national demonstration. He was in consequence regarded by them as a traitor, and had to leave college, and his country, which he seldom saw again. The strife between filial loyalty to an execrated official, who was yet a dearly loved father, and patriotic loyalty as he saw it, filled his life with doubts and uncertainties. Zygmunt Krasinski was the "Anonymous Poet" of Poland because he would not let his writings compromise his father with the authorities. In a singularly sorrowful and devoted life "he sacrificed," as Miss Gardner says, "no principle, no person, except one—



and that one was himself. . . . He dedicated his sad and frustrated life to Poland. . . . He taught her what he considered was her only means of salvation. Love, purity that spurns all evil weapons, pain borne for the redemption of humanity," was the creed he constantly enjoined.

The two men whose influence on the romanticists of Poland was deepest were undoubtedly Napoleon in the field of action, and, curiously enough, of mysticism too, and Byron in that of letters. The former they transfigured into a sort of demi-god, a supreme hero who inaugurated a new epoch of history. The admiration felt for him by the extreme group of mystics headed by Mickiewicz was so exaggerated as to fall little short of canonisation, and was quite out of touch with realities. In *Pan Tadeusz* Mickiewicz interpreted the feelings of his countrymen when Napoleon appeared on the Russian borders in that "memorable spring of war," 1812, a spring whose hope seemed so great, whose promise seemed so sure, that Polish patriots were thrilled with an ecstasy of exultant anticipation.

The rest of the world was drowned in tears and blood ; when that man, that god of war, girt with a cloud of regiments, armed with a thousand cannons, having yoked to his car of triumph the gold with the silver eagles, flew from the Lybian Plains to the sky-reaching Alps, hurling thunderbolt after thunderbolt. . . . Before him and after him ran victory and conquest. The glory of (his battles), pregnant with warriors' names, went roaring to the North till on the Niemen's banks it was flung back as from a rock by the ranks of Muscovy, defending Lithuania with their wall of iron.

In watching Napoleon's meteoric progress, a progress which seemed ever more likely to fulfil their hopes of restoration as it reached its culmination in the Moscow campaign, in counting his victories in which their own heroic sons gained fresh renown for Polish arms and maintained the chivalrous traditions of their forefathers, and in the tragic and pitiful spectacle of his later years, Poles forgot all their blasted hopes and remembered only the mighty man of valour who had so often led

them to victory.<sup>1</sup> It was a strange and a pathetic hero-worship !

The appeal of Byron to Poles is obvious. His romantic despair, his passion for liberty and his knight-errantry in support of an oppressed nation, naturally made him their model, and gave him for them a greater place in English literature than is his due. The whole romantic movement in Britain and in Germany suited the Polish genius, and gave it the key-note to that national poetry which was then burning unuttered in its heart.

Of all the great literary figures of former times Dante and Shakespeare probably influenced Polish authors most. But, as Brandes points out, the tragic circumstances of their own lives and times caused them to neglect whole aspects of those authors' works. The lovely and gracious influences represented by Beatrice, the calm dignity and noble mind of the lady Portia, the delicate wit and idyllic charm of Rosalind, the clownish antics of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the robust humour of the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, leave them untouched and unresponsive. It is otherwise with scenes of horror and of tragedy. These have an intimate relation to their own lives and experiences, and one finds echoes of the *Inferno*, of *King Lear*, of *Hamlet*, and of the historical tragedies, in their work.

In view of the compelling nature of their mental environment, of the all-embracing tragedy of their lives, public and private, it is not surprising to find much similarity in the work and the history of the great triumvirate of the romantic school, Adam Mickiewicz, Julius Slowacki and Zygmunt Krasinski. They all loved their country as they loved nothing else, and all suffered the pains of exile for her sake ; all, as it were, lived in the air, homeless and weary wanderers in far lands ; all were the prey alternately of bright unpractical mirages of hope for Poland, and of despairing grief when these faded away unrealised, leaving only a deeper gloom in their place ; all

<sup>1</sup> In Miss Gardner's words, they held that Napoleon was " the greatest man since Christ, and the man nearest Christ."

came under the neurotic influence of the half-crazy mystic Towianski. His visions of Poland in Messianic guise did, as we have seen, seem to give the Poles strength to endure and a hope of ultimate triumph, but they had a withering intellectual influence, so much so that the poets wrote little more after becoming his disciples. They all etherialised women and depicted them (as a rule) as charming or saintly beings whose feet barely touched common earth; and, as a rule, they regarded men only from the angle of Poland's wrongs, as godlike warriors doomed to avenge them, or as victims suffering extremities of wrath and madness, impotent to save themselves or her. Their lives were short and beclouded by ill-health and misfortune; their productive years were few, being unfortunately cut down by mysticism, melancholy, invalidism, and the sheer enervation born of such things. The wonder is, however, not that they did so little, or that their work was so limited in range, but that they did so much of such fine quality in their hampering circumstances, or indeed that they did anything at all worth preservation as a part of European literature.

Slowacki,<sup>1</sup> the Polish Shelley, has colour, brilliance, splendid diction, but lacks originality; or perhaps one should rather say that he experimented too much in the styles of other poets. He is not the equal of Mickiewicz or Krasinski in depth or in fine feeling, but he is a master of charm and of horror. His prose-poem *Anhelli*, which describes a mystical journey among the Polish convicts in Siberia, rises, however, to the first rank in the characteristic prophetic literature of the period. One or two examples added to those already given will sufficiently show the nature of its teaching.

Forgive us that we carry our cross with sadness, and that we rejoice not as martyrs; because Thou hast not said if our suffering will be reckoned to us as our expiation. But speak the word and we shall rejoice. . . . Happy are they who may sacrifice themselves for the nation!

<sup>1</sup> Slowacki (pronounce Swovatskee), 1809-1849. Chief works: *Lambro*, *Kordjan*, *Anhelli*, *The Plague in the Desert*, *Lilla Weneda*, *Beniowski*, *Mazepa*, *Balladyna*, *Lyrics*.

But keep hope. For hope shall go forth from you to the future generations and will give them life : but if it dieth within you, then the future generations will be as dead men. Keep watch upon yourselves, for you are as men standing upon a height, and they who are to come will behold you.

Krasinski <sup>1</sup> is inferior to Mickiewicz as a poet, to Slowacki as a stylist. He possessed a clearer insight than either, and possibly a higher political morality. For pure nobility of soul, for loftiness of outlook, for devotion unswerving and supreme to fine idealism, he has no superior. Though he is not the equal in stature of either of those literary giants, Krasinski's place is with Milton in English literature, with Tolstoi in Russian.

The temptation to quote interminably from his writings is strong, but we will content ourselves with these extracts, the third of which is almost the seer's last message to his compatriots.

As God is in heaven, so He will necessarily give (our country its) second body. For we have fulfilled the test of the grave. Our right is resurrection. To-day or to-morrow Thou wilt give it, Lord ! Oh ! Thou wilt give it for Thy justice's sake ; not because Thou owest it to us, but to Thyself.

Who dies in sacrificing self  
Floweth into lives of others,  
Dwells in human hearts in secret ;  
With each day, each little moment,  
Groweth living in that grave :  
Even like God Who is in heaven,  
Gives to all and gives herself,  
Yet her strength is not diminished.

Be thou an unbroken masterpiece of will ; be patience, mistress of misfortune that slowly buildeth up an edifice from nought. . . . Be peace amid the raving of the storm, and harmony in discord. Be thou eternal beauty in the eternal war of life. Be as a sister's tears to those who sorrow, the voice of manhood to those whose courage faints, a home to the exile, hope to those who have lost their hope, and to those sleeping in a deathlike trance be thou the awakening thunderblast. In the struggle with this hell of earth, be ever, everywhere, the strength that against death prevails with the stronger strength of love.

<sup>1</sup> Krasinski, 1812-1849. Chief works : *The Undivine Comedy*, *Irydion*, *Dawn*, *Psalms of the Future*, *Resurrecturis*. The first two quotations are from *Dawn* ; the last is from *Resurrecturis*.



Mickiewicz <sup>1</sup> was the national poet of Poland, its exponent and embodiment in literature, as Chopin was in music and Matejko in painting. But Mickiewicz was more than that : he was one of the greatest figures in European literature. He had the grasp of a master, the originality of a pioneer, the magic pen of a consummate stylist. His command of his own tool, the Polish language, was complete. His was a many-sided nature. He was learned and widely read ; a historian of language ; a critic of literature who had a tremendous vogue in Paris when a professor there ; a religious philosopher ; the moral teacher and spiritual and political guide of his nation : yet withal an intensely lovable and kindly man, one who attracted others by his inherent goodness and pure charity of soul. His work was not, like that of other authors of his time and race, wholly given over to mysticism and to spiritual imaginings, which, however elevated, have a somewhat neurotic tinge : he loved also the simple and natural, and maintained his serenity and steady hopefulness through all the trials of his life.

He was a man grown before Poland's worst purgatory began, and his genius had its roots in the manly, patriarchal and picturesque country life of his native Lithuania. The scenes of his childhood and youth had a haunting charm for the lonely exile, a charm so compelling that he wrote *Pan Tadeusz*, a work which is inspired by them, at the very moment (1831) when his country was overwhelmed by the might of Russia, beaten to the ground, deprived of its guaranteed rights, and beginning in sad earnest to tread the weary road of oppression of which, as the "Congress Kingdom," it had had abundant foretastes. *Ancestors*, his great tragic poem of the national captivity, has also for its background Lithuanian scenes and old-world customs ; but its treatment of them is coloured by the mental anguish engendered by the barbarities perpetrated by the tyrant, and only too faithfully remembered and depicted by the poet.

<sup>1</sup> Mickiewicz, 1798-1855. Chief works : *Ode to Youth*, *Grzywna*, *Crimean Sonnets*, *Wallenrod*, *Ancestors*, *Book of the Polish Pilgrimage*, *Pan Tadeusz*.

In *Pan Tadeusz*, Mickiewicz embalmed his memories of

the land of childish years . . . the only land in all the past and all the future where the Pole can find one spark of joy.

Written amid the din of public catastrophe and the pain of private bereavement, this great epic poem was a refuge for his own soul, and a distraction for the care-laden minds of his fellow-exiles. If hardly gay, it is serene in tone. It paints for us scenes which belong to the youth of the world. They are far removed from the sophistications of modern existence, the incessant preoccupations of industrialism and the gospel of hustle, which mar life and transform men into hunters of wealth and pleasure, into struggling and ruthless competitors for place and power, or into dangerously discontented and envious under-dogs who see but small chance of obtaining such good things.

As Brandes points out, Mickiewicz had the rare good fortune to find in his own experience the subject-matter of an epic. Primitive simplicity, a wide natural background untouched by modern "improvements," an atmosphere of endeavour and adventure on the heroic scale were all present in Lithuania at the epoch (1812) chosen for the work. Mickiewicz had no need to go to distant lands or to ransack remote centuries: his materials lay to his hand and made a peculiar appeal to his temperament.

The life he depicted was one that had even then died out and will never return, but Mickiewicz knew it in his boyhood and through the traditions of the countryside. He has reproduced for us with much of the *naïveté* of unspoiled childhood, yet with the discernment of manhood and the loving, beautifying touch of the artist, the primeval simplicity of life in his native land. We see it through his eyes as a land with household handicrafts but no trade; with many and picturesque costumes but no "fashions"; a land governed patriarchally by use and wont, where each man avenges wrongs done to himself or his family and where the steady tramp of the policeman is unknown; where there is only the life of the country;

where all are familiar with the sounds and sights of wild life, with the roar of beast, the song of bird and the varied hum of insect or reptile ; and where the very whispers of the leafy trees are half-articulate. He conjures all this up for us, and far more. He makes the dead generations rise and live for their descendants, and incites them to deeds worthy their sires. He re-creates the very atmosphere of hope and glory which made the year 1812 pulsate even in far Lithuania with the reverberations of victories "in the Pyramids, in Tabor, Marengo, Ulm, Austerlitz," victories which were for the Poles the presage of the consummation of their national hopes.



The first of the passages which are given below as illustrations of Mickiewicz's genius at its best on its two sides, as teacher and leader and as poet of nature, is taken from his *Ode to Youth*. It was written at the age of twenty-two, when he was a schoolmaster at Kowno. One thinks that such fine and stirring lines cannot have had any but a good influence. Yet one remembers that the poet's arrest, cruel imprisonment and exile were all caused by his membership of students' societies which had for their aim the moral betterment of young men, and were expressly neither political nor revolutionary in the ordinary senses.

And one wonders at the blindness and hardness of heart of Governments !

#### ODE TO YOUTH.

Heartless, soulless—these are nations of skeletons !  
 Youth, give me wings !  
 Let me soar above a dead world  
 To the heavenly land of illusions,  
 Where enthusiasm works miracles,  
 Strews the flowers of new things  
 And clothes hope in golden pictures.

. . . . .

 O Youth, to thee the nectar of life is only sweet  
 Then when it is shared with others ;  
 Divine joy intoxicates hearts  
 When they are bound together by a golden thread.

Together, my young comrades !  
In the joy of all are the hopes of all.  
Mighty in union, in exaltation wise,  
Together, my comrades !

And happy is he who has fallen at his post  
If with his dead body  
He has given to others a fresh rung  
In the ladder to the castle of glory.  
Together, my young comrades !  
Though the path be steep and slippery,  
Violence and weakness guard the entrance :  
Let violence hurl back violence  
And let us learn to conquer weakness in our youth.

He who as a child in the cradle  
Has smitten off the Hydra's head,  
As a youth shall strangle Centaurs,  
Shall tear from hell its victim  
And shall rise to heaven on laurels.

O Youth ! Thy flights are mighty as the flights of eagles,  
Like a thunderbolt thy arm.  
Ho ! Shoulder to shoulder ! With united chains  
Let us engirdle this little circle of earth.  
To one centre let us direct our thoughts,  
To one centre our spirits.  
On from thy foundations, thou clod of earth !  
We will force thee along new paths,  
Till, shaking off thy shrivelled covering,  
Thou shalt remember thy green years.

As in the lands of chaos and night,  
Of elements clashing in strife,  
At one word, " Be," by the might of God  
The living world appeared over the abyss,  
The winds roared, the deep seas flowed,  
And stars lit up the blue of heaven :  
So in the land of mankind there is still dark night,  
The elements of will are yet at war. . . .  
Lo ! Love shall breathe with fire,  
And from chaos shall come forth the world of spirit. . . .  
Friendship shall cement it with eternal bonds.



Burst is the heartless ice  
 And the prejudices that dim the light.  
 Hail! dawn of freedom!  
 In thy train comes the sun of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE WOODLAND'S EVENING CHOIR.

The sky seemed ever to droop and draw nearer the earth, till, both shrouded 'neath a dark veil, like lovers they began sweet talk, pleading their loves with faint sighings, with whispers and murmurs and half-uttered words, whence arose the enchanting music of night.

The owl started it, hooting above the roof of the manor. Bats rustled with filmy wings, and fluttered up to the house, where shone the window-panes and human faces. . . . In the air a great ring of insects assembled, whirling and playing as on the wheel of the harmonica. Zozia's ear could distinguish in the myriad harmony the chord of the tiny flies and the false semi-tone of the gnats.

In the fields the evening concert has scarcely begun. The musicians had ceased to tune up. The landrail had screamed thrice, the first violin of the meads. Then afar in the marshes the bittern had replied in the bass; then the snipes, as they soared and wheeled, cried again and again like the insistent beating of little drums.

As a finale to the murmur of flies and the clamour of birds, the two ponds answered with double choirs, like the enchanted Caucasian lakes that are silent by day and play by night. One pond, translucent of wave and sandy of shore, gave out from its bosom a deep solemn sigh. The other pond, with its muddy depth and troubled voice, replied with a cry of grief and passion. In both the ponds sang numberless hordes of frogs, both choirs uniting in two great chords. One sang fortissimo, but the other murmured softly. One seemed to complain, the other only to sigh. Thus over the fields the two ponds conversed like two Æolian harps playing alternately.

#### THE PLAYING OF THE HUNTER'S HORN.

He played. The horn, as a blast of wind, bore the music into the depths of the forest, and the echoes repeated the sound. . . . He filled, he awoke the oak-groves and the hunting-grounds. There rang in his playing the whole tale of the chase. First a gay ringing call, the challenge. Then growling and whining, the cries of the hounds. And here and there a sharper note, like thunder—the boom of guns when they fire.

<sup>1</sup>This translation and the next are by Professor Bruce Boswell; the last is by Brandes.

Here he stopped, but he did not drop the horn. They believed he was still playing, but it was the echo that played. Oak carried the sound to oak, beech to beech.

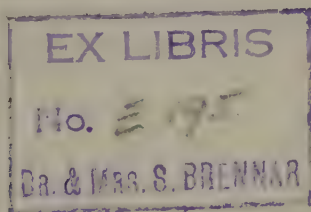
He blew again, and the horn was as if enchanted—now harsh, now delicate, as the mouth of the old man treated it. Just like a wolf's mouth, the horn now howls so hideously that all hearts fail. Again, as if it were a bear, it opens wide its throat and roars. Then the bellow of the wild ox tears the gale. . . .

He blew again as if within the horn were a hundred horns. So the wild chase through the grain of the peasant is heard. Shots, baying of hounds, the death-sob of the deer—and now he raises the mouth of the horn, and the triumphal fanfare smites against the vault of heaven.

All the trees of the forest were so many horns that carried the song to each other as from choir to choir. Tones rolling wider followed on tones; ever softer, ever purer, more tender, till they died away softly afar off, somewhere on the threshold of heaven.

Mickiewicz's description of the playing of the Tribune on his marvellous horn typifies his own achievement in Polish literature. He had "the melody of a hundred horns in his horn."

The poet has long dropped his horn. But he lives, and will for ever live, in the echoes he has evoked in Polish hearts: for his greatness was in essence that, through the genius which informed him, he raised to sublime heights the idealism and poetic fancy inborn in his race.



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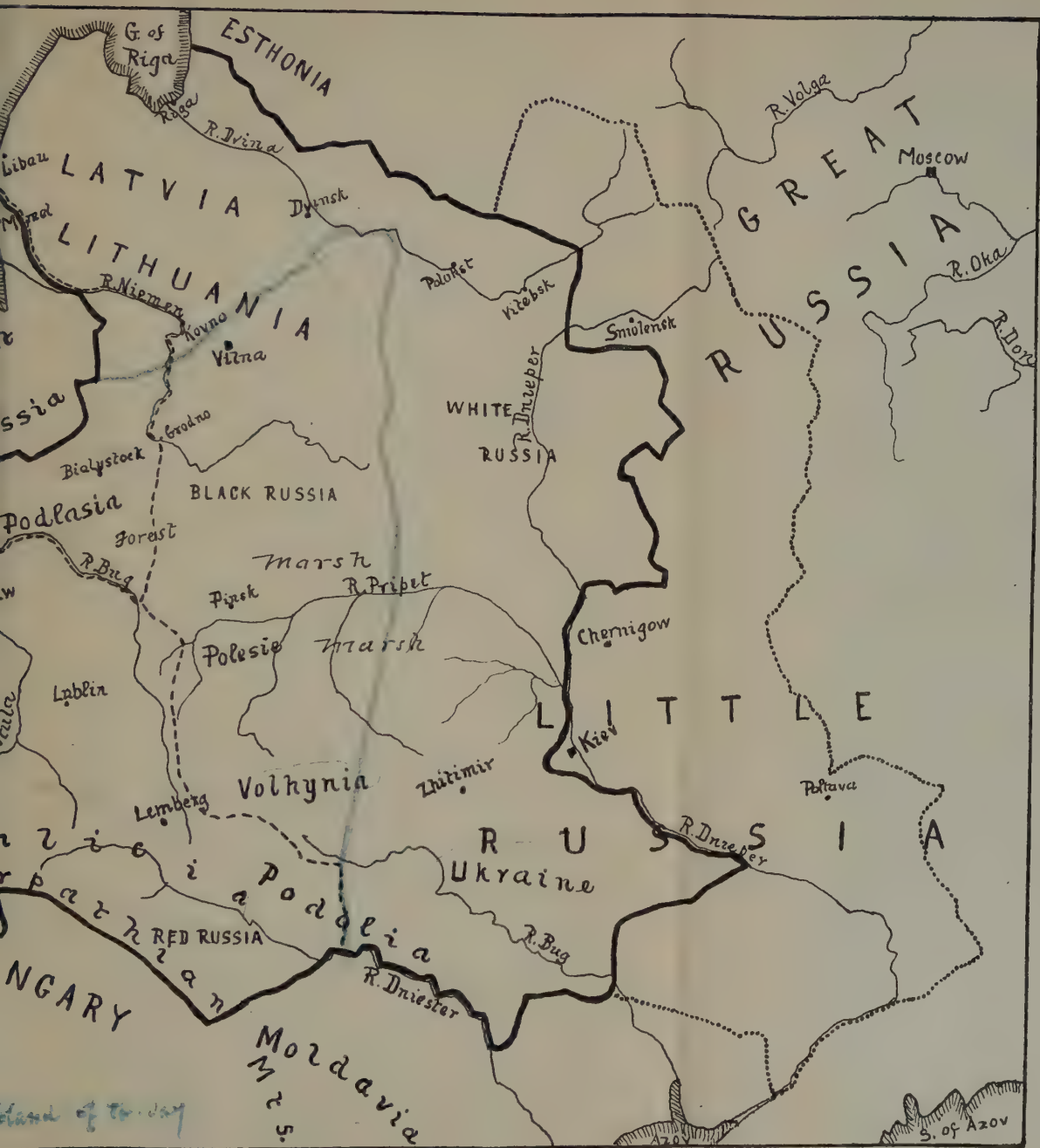
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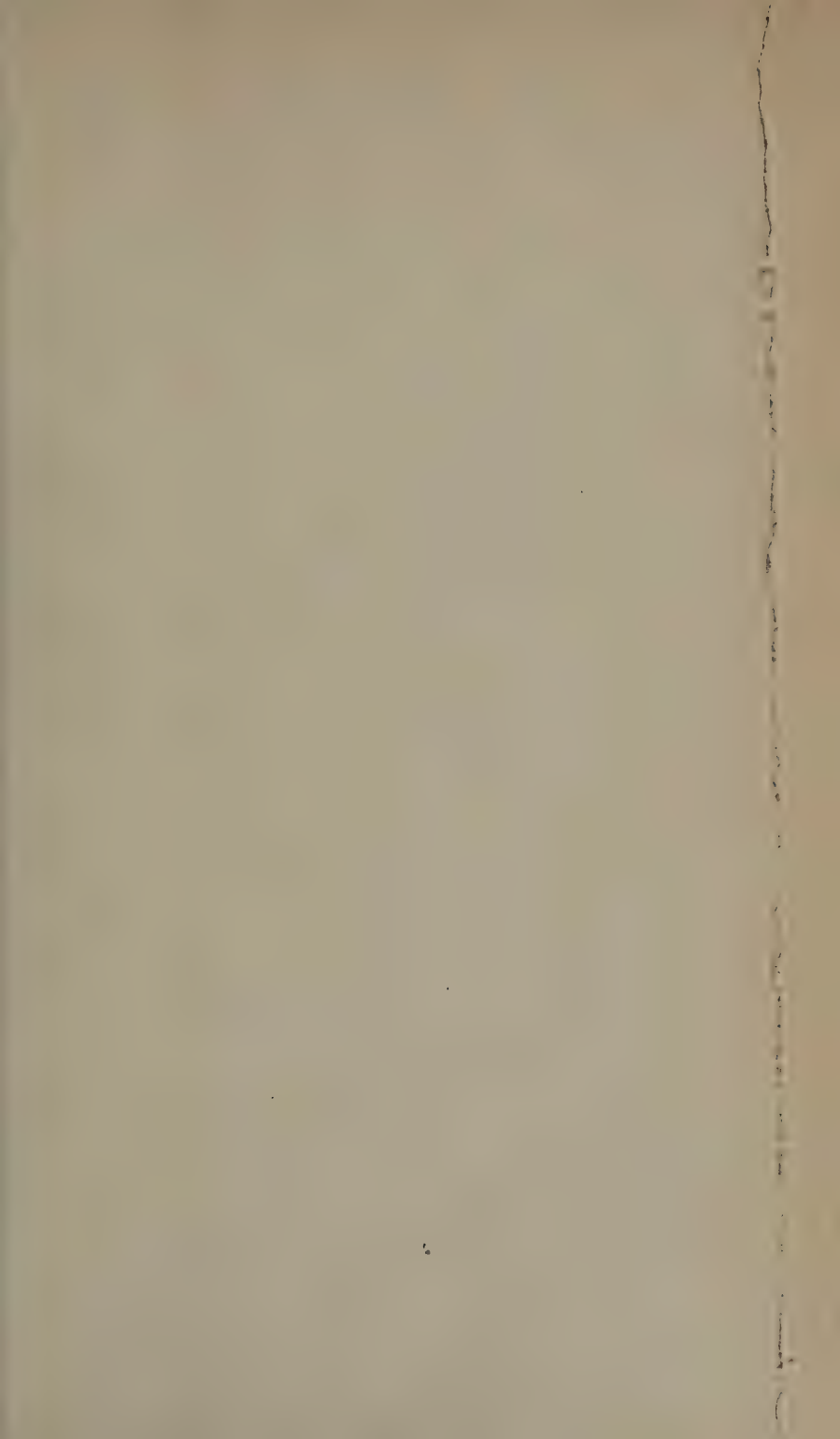
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